C O N T A C T

BY

CARL SAGAN

SCREEN STORY AND SCREENPLAY BY

JIM HART

FOR LYNDA OBST PRODUCTIONS
PRODUCER: LYNDA OBST

WARNER BROS.

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FIRST DRAFT SCREENPLAY
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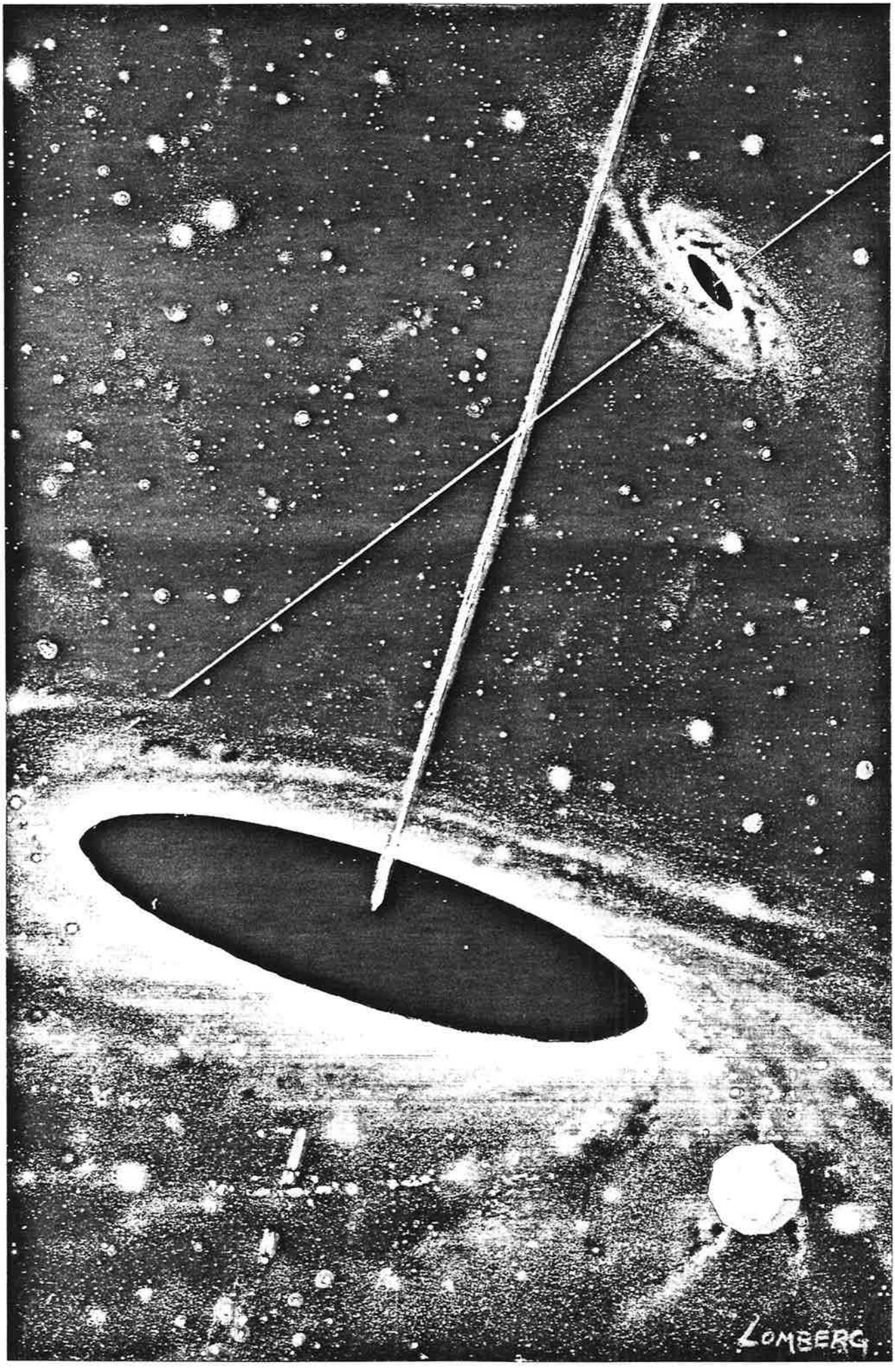

LOMBERG

"If they be inhabited, what a scope for misery and folly. If they not be inhabited, what a waste of space."

THOMAS CARLYLE

"The Cosmic Haystack is very, very big."

FRANK DRAKE
SETI Pioneer

"If we find the answer to why it is that we and the Universe exist--it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason--for then we would know the mind of God"

STEPHEN W. HAWKING
Lucasian Professor of Physics, Cambridge University

"We hope that very soon in the perspective of cosmic time we will have unified our planet peacefully...and will be ready to take that next great step, to become part of a galactic society of communicating civilizations..."

CARL SAGAN
Dir. of Space Sciences
Cornell University

"We've got company!!!!!"

HAN SOLO

CONTACT

ACT ONE - THE MESSAGE

BLACK SCREEN: SUPER

"THE COSMOS IS ALL THAT IS OR EVER WAS OR EVER WILL BE." -- CARL SAGAN

EXT. THE COSMOS - FROM OPAQUE DARKNESS

The Cosmos explodes into view on the grandest scale we know. Entire Galaxies are strewn like sea froth; millions of faint wispy tendrils of light.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE MILKY WAY GALAXY

A view from the edge. A great spiraling galactic disk tens of thousands of light years across. We drift above the spiral arms illuminated by billions of hot young blue stars. Ahead, in the center, the galactic core glows molten illuminated by millions of older redder stars.

The Galaxy is alive.

TO THE RING NEBULA (M57) - THE CONSTELLATION LYRA

A near perfect circle of sphere gasses rings the aging blue star at its center.

TO VEGA

The brightest star in Lyra. Something is there ahead of us in polar orbit around Vega. Closer. A vast IMMENSE WORLD-SIZED CONSTRUCT gleams in Vega's light. Too big to be artificial by human standards--but it is.

WE CIRCLE AN IMMENSE PERFECT POLYHEDRON

Encrusted with millions of bowl shaped transmitters each aiming at different parts of the universe. WE DESCEND INTO ONE VAST BOWL as it aligns itself by unseen hands. Appendages open at the center like a budding flower--

A CRESCENDO OF SOUND rushes forth. A lost chord. WE FLY WITH "THE MESSAGE" across the Galaxy!

INT. DELIVERY ROOM [1954] - BABY'S POV

Emerging from darkness. The blinding blue light of Vega becomes the light of a hospital delivery room. A Masked DOCTOR draws the infant from darkness up into the light.

ELLIE ARROWAY, age 10 seconds, doesn't cry. Her eyes grow wide at the bright lights.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR
It's a baby girl--

HER MOTHER, barely conscious lying on the table below her smiles at the news. The Doctor sneaks HER FATHER in--

MOTHER
Eleanor....

NURSE (O.C.)
Make time of birth--12:03 am--1954.

FATHER
Welcome to planet Earth, Eleanor Arroway. Happy New Year.

Ellie. Newborn puzzlement on her new face. PAN UP TO: THE LIGHTS

RESUME: DEEP SPACE - THE MESSAGE MUSIC: MESSAGE THEME

On its journey through the galaxy. We pass through a black dust cloud where young stars are just beginning to shine. An icy world evaporates--releasing gasses blowing away like a comet's tail in a cloud of colors.

EARTH - GOD'S POV

The big blue marble. Waiting. The rock beats of "HOUND DOG" echo up from Earth.

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1956]

Elvis sings "HOUNDDOG" for Ed Sullivan, screaming Girls, and anyone in the Universe who's listening. It's 1956.

EXT. CITY ZOO - DAY

ELLIE, age 2, bobs through the air on her father's shoulders clutching his thinning hair with little hands. Total glee in her face. JAKE ARROWAY is square jawed--gangly like Gary Cooper. Ellie is the light of his life.

ELLIE
(waves to old Lion)
Hi!

Nothing. Jake chuckles. At the Giraffe pen--

ELLIE
Hi! Hi! Hello!

The Giraffes watch her in silence. Confusion in her face.

ELLIE
Daddy---why they don't talk to me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAKE
That's because animals and people speak different languages, Presh--

ELLIE
(computing her options)
Oh--okay. Teach me, Daddy. I wanna talk to that big lion. Big lion.

He swoops her down in his arms, nuzzling her.

JAKE
Oh, Ellie--I wish I could.

He sets her down to walk. She's surrounded by a sea of legs. streaming by. She instantly protests--arms raised--

ELLIE
Daddy, up! Daddy, fall me UP!

He can't resist her plea. He does her favorite thing in life. He lifts her tossing her into the air--

HIGH ANGLE LOOKING DOWN - ELLIE - "FALLING UP"

Laughing, completely free, completely trusting--falling up toward us--that moment of weightless euphoria--she reaches for the sky--wanting to touch it--

ELLIE
Hi! Chirp--cheep cheep! Tweet!

--to the Birds flying overhead, sounding their cry. Ellie smiles. Contact. Gravity returns her to her father below her--his hands reaching--catching her safely in his arms.

RESUME: DEEP SPACE - THE MESSAGE

Passing through a globular star cluster. The star system rotates so feverishly, the stars distort themselves.

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1957]

Lucy and Desi. Desi runs panicked in his pajamas grabbing his hat, Lucy's bag--he runs out the door leaving a very pregnant Lucy behind. "I LOVE LUCY" MUSIC CONTINUES OVER:

EXT. LAUNCHING PAD - KAZAKHSTAN, RUSSIA - NIGHT

A Soviet ICBM is rolled to a launching pad by Russian engineers. Nuclear war threatens?

INT. ARROWAY HOUSE - THE SPARE ROOM - DAY [1957]

An old Motorola upright radio sits on a table; it's gothic point and bullet profile like a rocket on the launchpad.

CONTINUED:

On the back--a warning sign. LITTLE FINGERS trace each letter. A little voice reads aloud each word.

ELLIE (age 3)
"War--ning. Do not re--move"

ELLIE, Age 3, opens the back revealing a City of glass tubes, all heights and sizes. She touches one. Cold. She picks up the power cord studying the plug. She touches the prongs proving it's safe. Summoning her courage, she plugs in the cord. Tubes HUM to life.

She marvels at the magical glowing mini-city of lights.

ELLIE
"Oz"--It's Oz.

Uh oh. One fat tube doesn't glow. She carefully removes it humming "Follow the Yellow Brick Road". She shakes it. Nothing rattles. She turns it over inspecting the prongs.

CLOSER - A CIRCLE OF PRONGS

One is bent breaking the circle. She carefully rights it with her little fingers. The circle is perfect again. Ellie carefully plugs the tube back in. IT GLOWS!

Static emits from the speakers. It works! She turns the dial--curious. Music--Drama--An EXCITED VOICE stops her. She pulls her knees up to her chin (a habit she will never outgrow) to listen.

NEWSCASTER (RADIO)
...now orbiting the Earth.
"Sputnik" it's called. The
Russians claim Sputnik has no
military use. Moscow says "It's
just up there to say hello".
No comment from the Pentagon--

EXT. ELLIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUING ACTION

Ellie runs outside, plowing through billowing sheets hanging out to dry. The clothesline SQUEAKS on pulleys.

Her mother calls from the kitchen window.

MOTHER
Ellie--slow down!

INT. KITCHEN - POV THROUGH WINDOW - CONTINUING ACTION

Mother continues fixing lunch--watching Ellie outside. Ellie runs up to her father who's washing the family Ford.

Ellie talks excitedly pointing up in the sky. Jake picks her up on his shoulders and runs to the back of the yard for a better view of the sky.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUING ACTION

JAKE
It's not very big, Ellie, about the size of a grapefruit. It's going around the Earth talking to everyone--

ELLIE
What's it say, Daddy? Can't hear it.

JAKE
Oh, well, we need a special radio to hear it, Presh--but it's there.

Father and daughter gazing up at the sky. The same look of hope and awe and wonder in their faces. THE VIEW GLIDES TO: Mother at the window. She envies their relationship. Ellie is "Daddy's little girl."

EXT. EARTH - THE GODS POV

Sputnik orbits by "beeping". The universe beckons behind.

RESUME: DEEP SPACE - THE MESSAGE

We pass by the Rosette Nebula, a vast cloud of red, glowing hydrogen powered by very young stars much brighter than the sun. The wind from these stars is blowing out an immense cavity in the interstellar gas and dust.

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1964]

Ed Sullivan. The Beatles sing "She Loves You" offkey and out of tune. Everyone's screaming too loud to notice.

EXT. CHESEAPEAKE SHORE - NIGHT [1964]

Cabins dot the shore. ELLIE, age 10, lays on a grassy hill gazing at the blaze of stars. She pans a wire hanger wrapped with tinfoil across the night sky. A crude antenna. It's attached to her homemade cigar box crystal radio. She wears surplus headphones listening to sounds; static, foreign languages, the Beatles!

She stops--her "antenna" pointed at a familiar blue star glowing bright. Vega.

ELLIE
Starlight, starbright, first bazillion stars I see tonight, please take me to Oz tonight---

Ellie looks right, left, up and down. Elevated on the knoll, she is surrounded by stars in every direction. Blazing like her glowing tube city. Oz. WE HEAR: HER HEARTBEAT POUNDING. Stars seem to descend toward her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOOKING DOWN - THE VIEW DESCENDS ON ELLIE

Unblinking, transcendent, like an out of body experience.

HER POV - LOOKING UP - THE UNIVERSE

Now rushing toward her. She's "falling up" toward the stars. Her heart pounds. Ellie CRIES OUT! She DIGS HER FINGERS into the grass--holding on to Earth for dear life.

JAKE (O.C.)
What's up, Presh?

Dad leans over her. Stars twinkle behind him.

ELLIE
(breathless)
I got Belgium--

JAKE
(impressed)
You should teach my Freshman engineering class, Presh.

He curls her in his lap, beaming. She points at the stars.

ELLIE
Daddy--who's out there? Are there people some place else? I don't mean in heaven like they teach you in sunday school.

He takes a long look at the Cosmos. Question of the ages.

JAKE
Well, Presh, the Bible says God created life here on Earth--but it doesn't mention anywhere else.

ELLIE
Do you believe in God, Daddy --like Mommy does?

JAKE
That's a tough one. Well, if we're the only life in the Universe, then an awful lot of space God created is going to waste out there.

Ellie looks at her Dad with complete adoration. In the b.g., MOTHER'S SILHOUETTE appears at the cabin door.

MOTHER
Jake? I want Ellie inside now. It's way past her bedtime.

Ellie clings to him--Just a little longer-- Please--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
Know what I think--I think there's a Spacekid out there right now who's wondering if there's life on Earth--

MOTHER
Now, you two--!!

He scoops her up in his arms, faking how heavy she is.

ELLIE
No--I wanna stay here, Daddy--

JAKE
I'm not your real Daddy. I'm a Martian!

He makes a goofy face and sounds, gobbling her neck. She giggles all the way back to the cabin. THE CAMERA ROCKETS UP away from Earth at impossible speed into the stars.

RESUME: DEEP SPACE - THE MESSAGE

A Comet blows by. We chase it. Riding its magnificent tail of evaporating glowing ice!

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1966]

Laugh-In. Judy Carne "go-gos' in body paint.

JUDY CARNE
It's sock it to me time!

Sammy Davis gets the bucket of water in his face. Goldie Hawn does her classic goofy laugh. She gets drenched too.

INT. SCHOOLROOM - DAY [1966]

The "green" blackboard fills the view. MR. WEISBROD, Ellie's 7th grade math teacher, draws the Greek letter for "PI" on it. He faces his class of 12 & 13 year olds.

MR. WEISBROD
Let's start with something easy on our first day.
(groans from the class)
Who can tell me what this is?

Ellie, the youngest in class is the first to raise her hand. CLASSMATES look at her with disdain.

ELLIE
It's the greek letter for "Pi".

BILLY HORSTMAN, the class clown in front of her, raises his hand mimicking her eagerness.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLY
I'd love some "pi".

The class giggles. Mr. Weisbrod raps his ruler. Billy snakes his tongue at her. Ellie tries to ignore him--

ELLIE (continuing)
Pi's the circumference of the circle divided by the diameter.

Several Cheerleader types around her make faces.

ELLIE (continuing)
I sorta studied ahead last summer.

MR. WEISBROD
I see why you were allowed to skip a grade, Miss Arroway. Very good. Why don't you explain it for us?

She shrugs "I don't know". More giggles and snickers. Weisbrod writes "22/7" and "3.1416" on the board.

MR. WEISBROD
Pay attention. The answer for "Pi" is always the same answer no matter what size the circle.

BILLY
Same answer? No lie? Hey, I'll get one problem right on the "pop-quiz".

The whole class cracks up. Ellie doesn't think he's funny.

ELLIE
But why is Pi always that same answer if the circles are different sizes?

WEISBROD
(condescending)
That's just the way it is.
Now, your homework tonight is--

ELLIE
(relentless)
"That's just the way it is?" Why?

Billy turns around doing a mouth version of "Twilight Zone". The Class looks at her like she's from Mars.

WEISBROD
You're wasting the class's time--
AND mine.

The Class smothers derisive giggles and hoots. Ellie is completely humiliated.

CUT TO:

INT. ARROWAY KITCHEN - NIGHT - TIGHT ON ELLIE'S HANDS

Writing a string of numbers. Pages of handwritten numbers piled up by her. The radio, The Byrds; "TURN TURN TURN."

Ellie works feverish at the kitchen table calculating on a slide rule. She checks the wall clock. Midnight.

Determined, she measures the circumference of a drawn circle with a piece of string; then measures the string. She starts again using "long division". She begins to cry, disfiguring the circle angrily with her pencil.

JAKE (O.C.)
What's up Presh?

Jake enters in his P.J.'s. He grabs a box of graham crackers--a jar of Peter Pan peanut butter and joins her.

JAKE (continuing)
School? Uh, oh--Boys?

ELLIE
(in tears)
Math.

Oh. Worse. Jake doesn't laugh. He daubs her eyes and makes her a peanut-butter-graham-sandwich, checking her work.

JAKE
Must be "Pi" if it makes you cry.

ELLIE
Ha ha big joke--I divided Pi out to ten places. When does it end?

JAKE
That's the amazing thing about Pi, Presh. You can carry the decimal point forever--to infinity--and never reach the end and never repeat a pattern or sequence of numbers---Just random numbers forever and ever--

He writes 3.14156926535 and on at random on her paper. Now Ellie is even more confused.

ELLIE
How do you prove that? How can anybody know the numbers go on forever--and never repeat?

Ellie is completely frustrated, chucking more paper.

ELLIE (continuing)
You can't count numbers forever. You'll die...counting numbers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Is this Pi in every circle everywhere?

Jake holds the Peter Pan lid up considering its shape.

JAKE
Well, let's see--the Pi in this lid--is the same Pi you'd find--if you could measure say Jupiter--3.1416, etc. Pi is different than all other numbers. It's--mysterious. It never ends. It's a law of the Universe.

Silence. Ellie considers the Peter Pan lid.

ELLIE
Well, who made up the law?

JAKE
(lovingkindness)
If anyone can find the answer to that question, it's you, Presh.

Jake folds the Peter Pan lid in her hands, empowering her.

INT. ELLIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jake tucks her in.

ELLIE
Do I ask stupid questions, Dad?

JAKE
No, Presh. There are no stupid questions. You'll hear plenty of stupid answers for sure. For the rest of your life. But don't stop asking them, Ellie. Ever. That's how you find the truth. And it's the only way.

Jake tousles her hair. His favorite sign of affection. She hugs him a big hug.

ELLIE
G'night, Dad. Love you.

JAKE
Night, Presh. Love you.

He lingers at the door. A finality. Last glimpse.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY - ANT'S POV

512 images of Ellie peering down at us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE (O.C.)
"I shall call you Pinocchio--"

The Ant trundles up Ellie's half eaten apple. Ellie idles on a swing. She shows the Ant to a SECOND GRADE GIRL.

SECOND GRADER
(giggling)
Pinocchio--?

ELLIE (to the girl)
Not the Ant--A friend saw Geppetto talking to the wood puppet. "Geppetto --what are you doing?" And the old wood carver replied with dignity, "I am teaching the alphabet to the ants--"

The Second Grader giggles again. Ellie goes to take a bite of apple. She stops--face to face with the ambitious ant.

ELLIE
"A"....is for "apple", Ant.

MOTHER (O.C.)
ELLIE!

Her Mother hurries into the playground. She's completely drained and panicked. She grabs Ellie, shaking her--

MOTHER (continuing)
Why aren't you where I can find you!? I've been looking everywhere!

ELLIE
Mom--you're hurting me.

Mother sinks to her knees in grief. She hugs Ellie tight--

MOTHER
Oh, Ellie---something awful has happened. Your father--his heart... There was nothing they could do--

Mom sobs quaking. Ellie looks to the sky. "Presh".

FLASH TO: THE BAYSHORE - NIGHT [ELLIE'S IMAGINATION]

Jake stands on the hillcrest bathed in light. Above him, a blazing crystal city sprawls like the glowing tubes in the old radio. Aircars speed among crystal spires.

JAKE
Oz, Presh...

ELLIE AGE 2 (V.O.)
Daddy, up! Daddy, fall me UP!

Jake turns to Ellie--her arms stretched up. He smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. - DEEP SPACE: THE MESSAGE:

We pass through a rapidly rotating, flashing pulsar. Cosmic dust obscures our view in psychedelic colors.

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1969]

Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin step onto the moon's surface. They "Moonwalk" and plant the American flag on extra-terrestrial soil. "One small step for man...."

INT. CRASH PAD - NIGHT MUSIC: DYLAN/SHE COMES IN COLORS

JESSE, an acid rock "guitarman", and Ellie, sprawl wrecked on a floor mattress staring at a blacklight poster of the moon on the ceiling. She wears a t-shirt. He's nude. Jesse takes a big hit from a huge joint.

JESSE
...One giant toke for mankind.

Ellie laughs, stoned. He rolls on top of her.

ELLIE
Oooom, the Eagle has landed.
(aroused)
Be cool. My Mom found my pills.

JESSE
That's okay. Let's make a baby.

Ellie stiffens, frightened. She gets up. Torn. Aroused.

ELLIE
Then what? I drop out of school?
My Mom kicks me out? You split?

Jesse embraces her from behind, caressing her up and down.

JESSE
Hey, I'll even consider marriage.
Dodge the draft---

ELLIE
(fighting her desire)
I'm going to college. I got accepted. I can't. Don't you see?

He takes her all in. Dylan scores the moment.

JESSE (echoing Dylan)
"She's got everything she needs
she's an artist...and she don't
look back."

He kisses her gently goodbye.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SEA OF TRANQUILITY - EARTHSIDE

The U.S. FLAG stands proud--and lonely. Man's footprints mar the surface. THE VIEW TILTS UP TO: The Universe. Infinite. Something is coming.

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1974]

Richard Nixon says goodbye with a final wave on the helicopter steps.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - MORNING

A group of GRAD-STUDENTS and PROFESSORS pile out of a CALTECH VAN in front of the first Jet Propulsion Lab Radio Telescopes at Goldstone. ELLIE gets out last. Her 70's look. Jane Pauley hair. The only female face in the crowd.

She's talking a blue-streak to PETER VALERIAN; a quiet, handsome, unprepossessing brilliant astronomer.

ELLIE
I--I've read your paper on extra-terrestrial intelligence about a hundred times. It's---brilliant.

VALERIAN
Don't say that too loud. Drumlin thinks I'm wasting valuable telescope time and funds trying to find some signs of life.

She gawks in awe at her the size and majesty of the TWIN BIG DISHES tilted up toward the blue skies.

ELLIE
Are you?

DAVID DRUMLIN leads them all abuzz toward the dishes. 42. Excellent condition, premature gray hair, sardonic smile, Montana twang--the world's leading Radio Astronomer.

DRUMLIN
If anybody here is smarter than I am--<u>don't</u> shut up and <u>don't</u> listen--

Valerian whispers in Ellie's ear. Both are attracted to each other.

VALERIAN
He's not kidding.

Students laugh nervously.

DRUMLIN (continuing)
We don't see the universe in visible light. We "hear" it in radio light.

CONTINUED:

DRUMLIN (CONT'D)
Gasses, like hydrogen, give off natural radio emmissions. So do some stars and galaxies. These radio dishes are just big ears--like Valerian's here--

Drumilin tweaks Valerian's ear. Valerian makes eye contact with Ellie. He's completely embarassed.

DRUMLIN
Gentlemen--follow me--

Someone clears their throat loudly in the group. Drumlin stops, his piercing eyes revealing the culprit. ALL HEADS TURN TO: ELLIE continuing her disruption. Her innocent lopsided smile.

DRUMLIN
(irritated)
I forgot "ladies" again, didn't I--
(recalling her name)
Miss Arroway--I guess I just think of you as "one of the boys."

Ellie grimaces. Just what she wanted. Drumlin leads his group inside.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOJAVE CLIFFS - AFTERNOON

The big orange sun hangs over the mountains. The Goldstone telescopes are visible in the distance. On a wind swept cliff overlooking a vast desert lake, Drumlin's Group assemble two Hangliders. A familiar voice--

DRUMLIN
Let's go--move it. Wind's up. C'mon, Arroway. You'll give Scientist's a bad name!

Drumlin monitors the assembly like a Marine D.I. He moves Ellie aside and completes the carriage assembly.

DRUMLIN (continuing)
Didn't your Daddy give you an erector set?

Ellie wipes the hair from her face--miffed.

ELLIE
Boys need help erecting things. Girls do it by intuition.

DRUMLIN
Poor science, Arroway. Bad data. Okay--who's flying with me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A dare. No takers. Valerian helps him into his harness.

DRUMLIN
You--Valerian? Got any adrenalin left? You're in terrible shape--

VALERIAN
I'll just pick up the pieces when you auger in.

Drumlin laughs hearty grinning them all down.

ELLIE
I'll go. I'll-----do it.

Ellie and Drumlin face each other like gunfighters. Drumlin groans misery. The other Students clap and hoot.

AT THE VAN

Valerian helps Ellie into a jumpsuit, harness and helmet.

ELLIE
I have a bad feeling about this.

VALERIAN
You should. Nobody volunteers to jump with Drumlin. It's a game he plays.

ELLIE
Thanks. In case I "auger" in.

She extends her hand. They shake. He likes her touch.

VALERIAN
Any last requests?

ELLIE
Very funny, Peter--

He zips up her jumpsuit. They're face to face.

VALERIAN (continuing)
Mine is--life on other worlds. "ETI." What's yours?

ELLIE
(aroused, embarassed)
Same. Only radios. Big ones. The kind that can pick up hot signals --from out there--

Drumlin busts them, tired of waiting.

DRUMLIN
You're not going to grow wings, Arroway. Move your tailfeathers--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Their moment broken, they head to the group. Drumlin doesn't let up as Valerian and another Student strap her in giving her instructions and safety rules.

DRUMLIN (continuing)
And don't listen to Valerian about "Extra-terrestrial-ignorance".

ELLIE (defensive)
There's a hundred billion stars in our own galaxy--

VALERIAN
And a hundred billion galaxies--

DRUMLIN (on a roll)
And only two probabilities; One--there is intelligent life in the universe--but they don't fly around in UFO's. They're so far away you won't contact them in your lifetime anyway. And two--there's no intelligent life anywhere but Earth--so why bother to look?

VALERIAN (to Ellie)
He gets this way after mexican food.

Drumlin hoists his glider--steadied by helping hands.

DRUMLIN
Now--what are the probabilities of achieving heavier than air flight after three burritos? My law of the universe.

He runs and jumps off the cliff. He disappears then soars up into view like Icarus heading toward the afternoon Sun.

Valerian helps Ellie hoist her glider.

VALERIAN
You don't have to do this.

ELLIE
Bullshit! Just tell me--!

He jogs with her toward the edge. Closer. Closer.

ELLIE (continuing)
--Do you believe they're really out there? Quickly---don't be shy--

VALERIAN
Belief requires evidence. I want to find out. But--If we're alone--a lot of space is going to waste!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellie pales. That's what her father said. She looks down. SHE'S WALKING ON AIR! Stark fear and total exhilaration in her face. She soars!

TO THE SETTING SUN: IT DISSOLVES TO AND BECOMES:

AN ORDINARY YELLOW DWARF STAR IN DEEP SPACE

The yellow glow of our solar system. A giant horde of snowballs rushes by. The message continues its journey.

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1978]

Belushi's Samurai Warrior makes a Reuben Sandwich.

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1978]

On the news, Roger Mudd reports.

MUDD (TV)
--and Senator William Proxmire gives the golden fleece award for wasteful public spending to NASA and the "Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence."

We see Senator Proxmire with the Press in front of a large Radio telescope. He holds up gold-dyed lamb's wool.

PROXMIRE (TV)
If the extraterrestrials are so smart, they ought to be here. I look around I don't see any. And "even if life once existed on other planets--they're now dead and gone---"

INT. CALTECH LECTURE HALL - DAY

Drumlin finishes his final lecture of the term. Ellie is the first to stand up in a sea of Men and applaud.

Drumlin, unmoved, scowls at her over his reading glasses.

EXT. CALTECH CAMPUS - DAY

Drumlin and Ellie walk briskly in heated discussion.

ELLIE
Dr. Drumlin, please let me do my doctoral thesis in the SETI program. I've always wanted to communicate with what's out there--I dream about it--

DRUMLIN
"Communicate"? With what? Nothing out there but gasses, carbon compounds hydrogen, methane--?

CONTINUED:

DRUMLIN (CONT'D)
You want to communicate--get married--talk to your kids--

ELLIE
Oh, right. I can't imagine what I was thinking. Do you have a base-ball bat in your office? Any blunt instruments?

Drumlin roars. They enter his office building on the quad.

INT. DRUMLIN'S OFFICE - CONTINUING ACTION

An eclectic mess. Radio telescope photos of pulsars and interstellar gas clouds. Charts, books stacked about on the floor. She's right on Drumlin's heels.

DRUMLIN
There's a good reason only five women have ever become members of the National Academy of Science. You're too romantic. The Universe is strictly ordered according to its own rules and laws. To be a scientist, you have to think like the Universe does--You can't pass off romantic notions and "girlish longings" onto science.

ELLIE
Don't worry, Dr. Drumlin. I don't want to be smarter than you. I just want to learn---from you.

The great Drumlin stops dead. She got him where it hurts.

DRUMLIN
You and Valerian are going to ruin this institution with your "life in space" crap. SETI. You're as crazy as those UFO nuts.
(he considers)
Look I'll approve a general thesis on the radio detection of signals from space--but that's all. No ETIS.

Ellie. Yes!

RESUME: THE MESSAGE

As the message approaches our obscure planetary system, a strange looking object comes at us from the yellow glow.

The VOYAGER SPACECRAFT blows by. Elegant tendril limbs gleaming. We see the golden record affixed to it carrying greetings from the inhabitants of the solar system glowing ahead. Earthling hieroglyphics etched on the face.

CUT TO:

INSERT - VINTAGE TV [ARCHIVE FOOTAGE 1988]

Bush and Quayle raise their hands in victory.

EXT. MT. ARECIBO P.R.- DAY - AN ALIEN'S POV

They've landed! 256 images of the left world and 256 images of the right world. The 512 images form a wrap around view of giant blades of grass. It is an ant's pov!

The Ant heads toward a picnic lunch way across a blanket stretching ahead. THE VIEW CLIMBS the blades of grass with the Ant REVEALING: The chrome gleaming valley of "El Radar", the ARECIBO RADIO TELESCOPE; one thousand feet in diameter, cradled in a natural bowl of green mountains.

ELLIE & VALERIAN sit on the periphery of the vast concave dish. Both thirty-something now.

ELLIE
I love it here, Peter. It's just me, the big dish and the stars.
(her head on his shoulder)
I've missed you.

His arm encircles her lovingly. Way down in the dish, WORKMEN repair panels wearing special metal snowshoes.

ELLIE (fishing)
They look like...ants.
(teasing)
You know I even measured the dish just to make sure Pi still works.

She checks him with a glance. He's distant.

ELLIE (continuing)
You'll be happy to know it does.

VALERIAN
(he finally grins)
You've done wonders here. I'm very proud of you. That new interstellar cloud complex in Orion is a major discovery--40 nearby stars scanned for possible signals from ETI---

ELLIE
With no positive results. "Yeah, but can she cook?" Maybe there's nobody out there.

VALERIAN
Don't. You sound like Drumlin. You're ready to give up after forty stars--when there's four hundred billion stars in our galaxy alone. Remember?

CONTINUED:

He squeezes her tight, coming to life.

VALERIAN (continuing)
We're lucky. We're the first people in history with the techonology to find out. I'm glad I'm living now and not a hundred years ago. Now, we have a real shot.

She curls in his lap the way she did with her father.

ELLIE
I love you being here. Don't leave.

VALERIAN
That's what I wanted to talk to you about--I have an important question to ask you.

Ellie looks up at him, wishing, hoping--

VALERIAN (continuing)
I want you to join the new "Argus" project. One hundred telescopes in the same location--You can search more sky in one day than you can in a year here.

Not the question she wanted, but she's still ecstatic.

ELLIE
Oh, Pete. The National Science Foundation--The funding came through?

VALERIAN
Almost. I'll do the politicking and fund raising. <u>You just make contact</u>.

ELLIE
We'll be working together again--
No more long distance relationship--

She pulls his head to hers kissing him passionately. He pulls away--staring across the dish.

VALERIAN
You always try to reorder the universe, El.

ELLIE
(hurt but with authority)
I do not. I just want to know what the order really is.

VALERIAN
I'm relocating to Washington to work full time for the foundation. Ellie--I need you to join Argus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED

Silence. Only the rythmic "coquis" of the land frogs echoing up from the giant dish behind them.

ELLIE
Oh fine! Great! Get Arroway to communicate with the stars. She'll do it. She's "one of the guys".
(she softens, vulnerable)
I want you to need me for other things, too..

VALERIAN
(in knots)
What do you want? What?

ELLIE
I want you and me to ride off into the goddamn sunset and chase the stars.

There is a profound longing in her voice. She contemplates the sky. First stars come out.

VALERIAN
I'll just hold you back.

She faces him. She is so beautiful. He's buttoned up.

ELLIE
Why do you say that?--That's so--so arrogant. How do you know what I need? Or want--?

VALERIAN
Aw, Ellie--You want to know why trees grow--how galaxies are born? If this is all just one big accident or the work of a supreme intelligence--I can't compete with that. At the end of the day, I just want to go home--put my feet up--eat dinner and love my wife...

Ellie is vulnerable and she can't hide it--

ELLIE
I've got nothing against marriage.

VALERIAN
--I'm <u>getting</u> married. I met her in Brazil. NASA research last year. She's a nice woman...You'll like her, El, I know you will. <u>She's--what I need</u>--

HIGH ANGLE - THE DISH

Ellie stands--tiny--ant like--dwarfed by the great circle.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

ANOTHER CIRCLE: EXT. NEPTUNE - THE MESSAGE

The signals bombard an outermost world of our solar system; Neptune--an austere deep blue gas world with swirling clouds of methane. Signs of life? None.

THE MESSAGE ZOOMS BY MORE WORLDS at light speed. One with rings. A small reddish one--and then....

RESUME: THE MESSAGE - TO EARTH - DESCENDING VIEWS

Now the pulses wash against a warm world, blue and white, spinning against the backdrop of the stars. There is life on this world, extravagant in its numbers and variety...

Radio pulses glide past satellites, the Hubble telescope, the skeleton construct of the Russian/U.S. space station "Mir"--"Freedom"; a booster rocket advertising "LETHAL WEAPON VI." Countless bits and pieces of discarded "space junk" float in orbits around the planet.

Then through the atmosphere and clouds. Radio pulses wash over vast smoldering wastelands of Rain Forests that are no more. And oceans littered with refuse; beaches with corpses of great whales and dolphins--fish of all kinds.

The pulses bombard deserts with the twisted wreckage of war; rivers that foam putrid chemicals; and mountains rising above smog filled valleys.

EXT. NEW MEXICO DESERT - NIGHT

An OLD NAVAJO SHAMAN chants in his sweat lodge on a barren landscape. The heavens speak. "Good News". He exits his lodge to view a wonderous event.

The sky is filled with a meteor shower. And something else--The old man raises his hands and dances his thanks.

THE VIEW CLIMBS REVEALING: A HUGE RADIO TELESCOPE

What Whiteman has brought to Indian lands. The VIEW GLIDES OVER: A "VERY LARGE ARRAY"; 131 RADIO TELESCOPES spreading for 10 KM across the New Mexico desert, "like some strange species of mechanical flower straining toward the sky."

RESUME: THE MESSAGE POV - DESCENDING

We rush with the message down from the heavens--INTO THE WESTERN MOST DISH and carress the antenna at the center like a bee buzzing around a fertile pistil.

SHARP CUT TO:

INSERT: TV - LARRY KING LIVE

Larry King bugeyes his familiar face of the 90's.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LARRY KING (TV)
We're talking with Palmer Joss--
"God's accountant" according to the
New York Times. His new book--
GODKILLERS. Welcome Rev. Joss--So,
who are the "Godkillers"?

Our first glimpse of PALMER JOSS. He has the rumpled manner and charm of Will Rogers. Totally believable. Charissmatic. A man who wants "the good old days" back.

JOSS (TV)
Well, Larry--what has science
really done for us? Are we happier?
Is our world fundamentally better?

WIDEN SLOWLY TO REVEAL: INT. ARGUS CONTROL - NIGHT

DISPLAY MONITORS show sky survey views of space Argus is monitoring; with star names, distance from earth in light years and, for fun, an animated dot-to-dot which connects the stars in the shape of their respective constellations.

AT THE COMMAND CONSOLE - WILLIE AND FISHER

Battle the ennui of their watch. Both look like Leftwing Radical Rock'n Rollers instead of cliche' Nerds. BOB MARLEY plays on a boombox. FISHER watches Larry King and Joss on a monitor right between the Hercules constellation screen and the Lyra constellation screen.

JOSS (TV CONT'D)
I have dedicated my life to under-
standing the nature of Almighty God.
I study the sciences and my religion.
But do scientists come to religious
leaders for insights and prayer?
They never give us a second thought
except when they mislead us or
deceive us--

The 131 telescopes are visible through a panorama window.

SUPER: ARGUS PROJECT - 1999

THE MONITOR: **A HADDEN ELECTRONICS LOGO** i.d. the make.

JOSS (TV CONT'D)
I have seen God face to face--
"Where's the evidence?", Scientists
say--"Show me"--I have faith in--

FISHER
I wish God would talk to him
about his hair. Whoa--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Fisher pours a coffee from the drip machine. Bumper stickers on the water bottle; "BLACK HOLES ARE OUT OF SIGHT" and "FRODO LIVES". Cookies and Candy abound. Cases of coke and Dr. Pepper stand next to a bank of analyzers.

FISHER
How long've we been searching for little green men, Willie--5 years?

WILLIE is heavy into his Gameboy.

WILLIE
Seems like a hundred--

FISHER
I heard the boss talking about Drumlin pulling the plug on the whole project.

WILLIE
Vampires. They'd make perfect Astronomers. Just the right synthesis of career and lifestyle.

Fisher shoots him the finger. An alarm "screes" The command display flashes:

ALERT OPERATOR IMMEDIATELY. SIGNAL OF POSSIBLE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL ORIGIN INTERCEPTED

A DISPLAY MARKED: INTENSITY VS. FREQUENCY repeats a sharp vertical computer line spike-pulsing.

Fisher and Willie nonchalantly go through their routine checks at the command console.

WILLIE	TRADEOFF	FISHER
It's the guys at Goldstone stone. Friday night is prank night. Could be Airforce AWACS.		Glitch in #49. Hey, it's a monochromatic signal. Strong, too. Check it.

THROUGH THE WINDOW - THE GIANT RADIO TELESCOPES TURN

One by one, they fix on the same point in the sky. Willie and Fisher watch, both spooked. One by one, ALARMS "scree" on all 131 displays. Each flashes the same prompt:

ALERT OPERATOR IMMEDIATELY. SIGNAL OF POSSIBLE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL ORIGIN INTERCEPTED.

FISHER
The Airforce isn't supposed to use this frequency. Call the Boss.

The VIEW GLIDES TO: the monitor beside Joss's. The Lyra constellation is displayed. Cute animated computer lines connect the stars forming a harp, "the Lyre."

CUT TO:

INT. BOSS'S QUARTERS - NIGHT - TIGHT ON ELLIE ARROWAY

Frizzy hair pokes out around her headphones. She is curled in a "sleepchair", knees to her chin, lost in white noise. She looks younger than her 40 odd years. Politically inflamatory t-shirt. Denim overalls. Hardly the image of the "boss" of a deep space network. Her eye lids flutter--breathing shallow as she drifts in a sound spectrum.

INTERCUT WITH ELLIE: WE SEE WHAT SHE HEARS

Tires humming along a 2 lane desert highway.

The hum of old radio tubes coming to life in the Motorola.

A smooth swipe of a razor over her father's beard.

Then a funny clacking and munching....THE ANT eating a sugar cube. It speaks like Alvin the Chipmunk--

THE ANT
"A" "B" uh...."F"

RESUME: ELLIE; She laughs like a little girl. Her forehead tenses. A new sound. WE HEAR: A repeated single note.

WE SEE: An army of clothespins marching in line. Her Mom pinning up the laundry. Then the sound--the steady rythmic METALLIC PULSES of the metal pulley on the clothes line...

ELLIE wakes startled, grasping the armrests as if she's falling. An alarm bleems on her headset.

ELLIE (voice command)
Oz!

Instantly her quarters are filled with light. Her big-wall pops on. Larry King and Joss.

JOSS (TV CONT'D)
--or do the Scientists bribe us with hightech toys? Housekeeping robots, holographic TV, virtual reality sex--irradiated fruit--while they undermine our faith?

ELLIE
C'mon, Joss--faith in what? A heaven that looks like a shopping mall--?

Ellie clicks the TV off as she heads to her "in house" command console. Pieces of her past are here and there. The blacklight moon poster. The old Motorola radio.

She boots her system. Her Peter Pan lid hangs on a hook beside her monitor. Willie pops into view.

CONTINUED:

WILLIE (monitor)
We've got a bogey, Doc.

ELLIE
What's the "freq"?

WILLIE (monitor)
You're listening to it. 9.2 gigahertz.

Ellie punches the audio over speakers. The message pulses the same metallic sounds the old clothesline pulley made.

INT. ARGUS COMMAND CONTROL - NIGHT

Ellie uses her palmprint code to enter the security door. The message signal pulses over speakers incessantly. The place is filling up as SCIENTISTS and TECHNICIANS gather intently at the command console. Kinetic atmosphere.

ELLIE
This better be good, guys, I was making love to Einstein and Redford at the same time.

Laughter crackles. Tensions released. No time to shower or even change--she takes over the command console.

ELLIE
What've we got?

BIGSCREEN COMMAND DISPLAY: Computer animation shows 116 of the 131 Telescopes receiving the message. She types in:

SEARCH>STAR FIELD ORIGIN OF SIGNAL>

Lyra pops up. A familiar blue star gleams.

ELLIE
Hello, Vega. Only twenty-six light years away. We're practically neighbors. I scanned it first at Arecibo. Negative results. Always.

WILLIE
I can confirm sidereal motion. Signal source is moving with the stars. It's not coming from down here.

FISHER
Major Rose swears NORAD's not on any of these frequencies.

ELLIE
That's what they always say! What about "darks"? "Snoop" satellites?

CONTINUED:

BIGSCREEN DISPLAY: Computer Animation flashes a view of Earth and all satellites and space junk in orbit. "Darks" glow in red. Hubbel telescope. Space Station construction. A Space shuttle orbits. 9,000 objects in all.

ELLIE
Junk. What a messy species.

FISHER
NORAD's not tracking any spacecraft in our vector. No "snoop" satellites.

FISHER (CONT'D)
Shuttle "Endeavor" is in sleep mode.
(then he adds)
No non-terrestrial aerial phenomenon reported.

ELLIE
Okay, we're not going to give the UFO freaks anything to flap about.

Ellie is all procedure trying stay calm. But the excitement ripples through the gathered--

ELLIE
C'mon, girls, school's not out yet. What's the intensity?

BIGSCREEN DISPLAY: A sound spike leaps with each pulse. Audible reactions echo throughout the control room.

WILLIE
Look at the janskys! You can hear this "bogey" on a car stereo!

Willie cranks the gain. The Pulses BOOM from the speakers. More reactions. The gathered buzz with anticipation.

ELLIE
(listening on headphones)
Numbers! Somebody's sending numbers! Each pulse is a number set. Let's break it down--

BIGSCREEN DISPLAY: Now with each pulse long strings of zeroes and ones "00000110011110000001010" appear.

PROMPT: WORKING>OPERATION COMPLETED
DISPLAY RESULT? Y/N>

She types in: "Y">

BIGSCREEN DISPLAY: Now with each pulse, numbers appear. One after another. Note: Numbers continue through scene.

59 61 67 71 79 83 85 89

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FISHER
Aren't those all prime numbers?

ELLIE
Prime numbers! Numbers that can only be divided by 1. That's no accident of nature, guys. No pulsar or gas cloud can give off just prime numbers. Whoever it is knows their math. That has to be a sign of intelligence--

The room ignites with anticipation. Ellie quickly sobers for fear of behaving "unscientific."

ELLIE
Okay, let's slow down. If anybody can come up with any other explanation besides extraterrestrial intelligence, let's hear it.

Ellie points her finger at the ceiling. Her simple gesture is now suddenly the focus of every eye in the room. Her heart palpitates. Her finger is SHAKING.

FRANK
No way that signal's from Vega. That solar system's not old enough.

FRANK, an older disabled VET ASTRONOMER wheels to the constellation monitor in his electric cart.

FRANK (continuing)
It's planets are still forming. There hasn't been enough time for intelligent life to evolve.

Silence. Tides shift. Hopes fall.

ELLIE
Willie! Fisher! If this is one of your pranks you can kiss your post-docs goodbye!

Willie and Fisher look at each other, busted.

WILLIE
Signal is not a program somebody with a warped sense of humor fed the computer.
(eyes Fisher accusingly)
No computer virus. The system has not been compromised.

Fisher sweats bullets, digesting the data thrown at him on the computers. He punches up Vega on the big display.

CONTINUED:

FISHER
Constellation, Lyra. Brightest star, Vega. An A-zero main sequence dwarf star. Estimate few million years old. Distance, 26 light years. Accretion disk. No known planets--

BIGSCREEN DISPLAY: ELLIE'S BLUE STAR GLEAMS

Ellie moves into view--

ELLIE
Okay--so maybe the ETIs didn't grow up in the Vega system. Maybe they're just visiting.

FRANK
No good. That system's full of debris. If they stay very long, their spacecraft'll get clobbered.

Frank won't give in. Ellie won't either. Scientists and Techies surround them like a cock fight.

WILLIE
C'mon, Frank--so they kick into "warp drive", take evasive action and vaporize the garbage. Huh?

Lots of reaction here. The room is electric.

ELLIE (continuing)
No--Frank has a point. If we go public and we're wrong, Drumlin will have us looking for jobs in the fast food sector. Right Frank?
(all agree)
We're fighting to keep the doors open--so let's be sure about this.

Frank wheels to the big window overlooking the telescopes. Ellie concedes. He points outside. It's getting light.

FRANK (continuing)
Vega will set in a couple of hours. It's probably already risen in Australia. Let's call Sydney and get them looking with us. If they pick it up--I'm a happy camper.

Every face in the room looks to Ellie for agreement.

EXT. CSIRO RADIO TELESCOPE - AUSTRALIA - DAY

IAN (V.O. phone)
9.2 gigahertz? We've been picking it up for a quarter hour.

CUT TO:

INT. CSIRO CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUING ACTION

IAN BRODERICK, head of SETI downunder, is on the phone. Excited TECHNICIANS plot a coordinate on a starfield map.

IAN (continuing)
Right. All prime numbers so far.

He reaches across the map spotting the point of origin.

IAN (continuing)
We put it smack in the middle--Vega.

INT. ARGUS COMMAND CONTROL - SAME TIME

Ellie tries not to scream on the other end of the phone. She shushes the eruption from her colleagues. Then calmly and politely--

ELLIE
Right, Ian. Just keep tracking it as long as you can and catalogue the data. We'll get back to you.

She hangs up--pumping her fists.

ELLIE
YES!

Everyone goes bananas. Frank does a wheelie in his cart. Fisher and Willie enter commands. Other's shout and call out readings.

WILLIE
Somebody get me a fax number for the Bejiing Radio Observatory!

THE BIG DISPLAY: A world map apppears. Symbols of radio telescopes appear. A red line links the strategic ones.

Ellie pauses admiring the group of Scientists who have worked with her for years to this moment. She's overwhelmed.

FISHER
Japan's on line. Tsuguru station confirms signals from Vegaaaa--

#2 BIG DISPLAY: Prime numbers--now up to 881 883 887 907.

FISHER
Dr. Arroway--are you okay?

Ellie is transfixed on the display. She snaps to, handing Fisher a handwritten note.

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
Get this out to every observatory and radio array on the planet. And get me the President's Science Adviser.

A momentary silence quells the control room. Only the pulsing beats of the message--endless numbers click by.

FRANK (rolling to her)
You're bypassing the NSF? What about Drumlin? He'll shit little green men.

ELLIE
I'd pay to see that. I'll deal with Drumlin.

Ellie exits to cheers, whistles, back slaps, hugs--

INT. ELLIE'S QUARTERS - CONTINUING ACTION

She shuts the door--then it hits her. The overwhelming truth. Her world--hell, the whole world--will never be the same. She sags closing her eyes. She listens to her heart beat. She slides to the floor resting her chin on her knees. She looks up, breathless, she closes her eyes....

ELLIE
Holy shit----Contact.

FLASH TO: THE STARS RUSHING AT HER

"Falling up".

SHARP CUT TO:

INSERT - ELLIE'S TELEGRAM - SHE READS V.O.

ANOMALOUS INTERMITTENT RADIO SOURCE AT RIGHT ASCENSION 18h 34m, DECLINATION PLUS 38 DEGREES 41 MINUTES, DISCOVERED BY ARGUS SYSTEMATIC SKY SURVEY. FREQUENCY 9.24176684 GIGAHERTZ, LYRA\VEGA SYSTEM. 174 AND 179 JANSKYS. EVIDENCE: SEQUENCE OF PRIME NUMBERS FULL LONGITUDE COVERAGE URGENTLY NEEDED. E. ARROWAY, DIRECTOR, PROJECT ARGUS, SOCORRO, NEW MEXICO, U.S.A.

SUPERIMPOSE THE TELEGRAM OVER MONTAGE: WE FOLLOW IT TO OBSERVATORIES AND RADIO TELESCOPES ALL OVER THE WORLD

Russia, China, India, Chile, Canary Islands/Spain, Hawaii, Great Britain, California, Arizona, France, Africa, Australia--Arecibo at Puerto Rico; showing perhaps for the first time the vast numbers of telescopes we have on our small planet and their breathaking exotic locations.

The telegram is delivered by bicycle, truck, helicopter, mailpersons on foot and of course--by fax. WE HEAR: Different languages reading its contents.

MONTAGE CONTINUED:

PRIME NUMBERS CONSTANTLY STREAM OVER THE MONTAGE tying the network of observatories together.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TV CONTROL ROOM - LOCATION UNKNOWN

Another bank of Monitors. TV from all over the world plays. CNN, BBC, etc., peppered with "R" AND "X" RATED ADULT fare . Sex game shows, hotel movies, old Howard Stern shows, "Midnight Blue". The same HADDEN logo i.d.'s the array.

TO THE LAST MONITOR: In the midst of this electronic world and perversion: THE TEXT OF ELLIE'S TELEGRAM PRINTS OUT!

HANDS glide to a computer keyboard. Infra-red sensors on the User's fingers merely point to onscreen commands.

FILE>ARGUS>E MAIL: ACCESSING>

The display rushes through menus and files at blurring speed. Suddenly PRIME NUMBERS APPEAR.

1009 1013 1019 1021

Pulsing. The signal Argus is receiving. The SILHOUETTE OF A MAN in front of the monitors reacts. Animated. Exalting. He points a sensor finger CHANGING EVERY SCREEN until the entire electronic wall is a symphony of prime numbers!! Streaming by us. Hypnotic.

SPLIT DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WHITE SANDS AFB - AERIAL VIEW - DAY

SUPER:[16:30 HUNDRED HRS.]

Airforce 2 lands. Government Motor Pool cars speed toward the jet as it stops on the tarmac.

MICHAEL KITZ, a bulldog Asst. Secretary of Defense, and a small entourage of PENTAGON STAFF deplane. They're met by AFS (Airforce Security) BLUE BERETS. Snappy salutes.

PETER VALERIAN is the last to deplane. Graying. In his forties. The Presiden't Science Advisor is not happy at this show of force.

VALERIAN
What's all this, Kitz? I didn't advise the President that we're expecting an invasion from Mars.

KITZ
National Security.

Valerian's heard that before. Bad news. The convoy leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARGUS ARRAY - MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

SECURITY GUARDS stonewall 2 Mobile TV NEWS TRUCKS denying entrance. A handful of UFO FREAKS picket the entrance carrying signs; "UFO JUSTICE", "STOP THE COVERUP".

UFO FREAKS(chanting)
U-F-Os--We want to know!

INT. COMMAND CONTROL - NIGHT - LATER

Frank, in his cart, tours Valerian, Kitz, Drumlin and the rest of the DELEGATION around the controls. Coffee cups and cigarettes abound. PRIME NUMBERS scroll on displays.

SENATE DELEGATE
Well, if they aren't green and mean and pack lasers, my son will be very disappointed.

Polite laughter. Drumlin remains aloof, studying data on a display with Willie.

DRUMLIN
(to Willie)
Arroway may have just sunk the program. If this is a hoax--

WILLIE
Sir, eighty-seven telescopes are receiving the same signal.

Kitz is third degreeing the rest of the Argus Team.

KITZ
If this civilization is so advanced, why the prime numbers? That's fifth grade math. Maybe we should be insulted. Why don't they speak English if they're so smart?

Frank rolls to Valerian. "Who is this guy?"

VALERIAN
(diplomatic)
Well, maybe because 70% of our species speak other languages.

Kitz scoffs. Ellie enters--escorted by a Blue Beret.

ELLIE
Math is the only true universal language, to answer the gentleman's question. And physics. That's why they're sending prime numbers. We didn't make them up. Sorry I'm late--

CONTINUED:

The Argus Team has never seen this Ellie. Hair coiffed. Hint of makeup. Black tights, stylish blazer. New high heels. Frank gives her the once over in his cart. She makes a face at him.

ELLIE (continuing)
What we're actually receiving is a beacon, an announcement signal. It's designed to get our attention.

She certainly has theirs. Drumlin peeks from the display he's working at; he shakes his head in dismay watching the men gravitate to her.

DRUMLIN
It doesn't make sense, Arroway. You--everybody's looked at Vega. For years. Suddenly, yesterday, Vega starts sending prime numbers? Why now? What's so special about now?

Ellie takes the mild scolding from her mentor with calm repsect. Now in his 60's, he's older, sadder, even more eccentric, but still brilliant and physically fit.

ELLIE
I'm counting on your expertise in decrypting signals to find out-- David. We don't know if there's a deeper message. The prime numbers could be a code.

Drumlin can't argue her logic or shun her praise. Ellie has neutralized him. Fisher and Frank do a tiny "lowfive".

ELLIE (continuing)
The signal could be a primer--so--
(falters seeing Valerian)
--we--can--communicate--

The two shake hands--longer than necessary. Much longer.

VALERIAN
Dr. Arroway.

ELLIE
Pete. Been a while. How are Jan and your daughter?

VALERIAN
Fine, just fine. And it's "daughters"

He holds up two fingers. Ellie marvels. Time flies.

ELLIE
Serves you right being surrounded by women. How's Washington?

CONTINUED:

VALERIAN
New administration. Same old ratrace.

ELLIE
Not anymore. We've got company.

The Argus Team audibly reacts. Valerian acknowledges her kudo. Kitz inserts himself between them.

KITZ
Dr. Arroway--

VALERIAN
Ellie--this is Michael Kitz, Assistant Secretary of Defense.

Valerian sees her hackles go up. He radiates restraint. Kitz has the handshake of a cold fish.

ELLIE
Mr. Secretary, could you ask that man there with the blue hat and the gun to leave--?

Gushing polite, she points to the AFS Beret at the door.

ELLIE (continuing)
I'm sure you know we're a civilian facility. We really don't need his protection.

Kitz curtly dismisses the Beret. Valerian signals her to back off. Ellie smiles. Fat chance.

KITZ
Let me come right to the point, Dr. Arroway. Frankly, your sending this telegram all over the world is a breach of National Security.

He holds up a copy of the telegram as if it's "Exhibit A".

ELLIE
Mr. Kitz, this message from another civilization isn't a "person to person" call. Do you really think the extra-terrestrials intended to communicate only with Americans?

Frank and Willie trade wary glances. Drumlin watches the shooting match as he continues to work out of view.

KITZ
You might have consulted us. The contents of this message could be of a sensitive nature.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
(incredulous disbelief)
You want to classify prime numbers?

Valerian separates them with unassuming grace.

VALERIAN
Michael, Dr. Arroway did the right thing. The Earth's rotation--
--we're only in line with Vega so many hours a day, then we lose it. Other telescopes can pick it up--
You can't keep the signal a secret.
(moves to world display)
If she hadn't pulled together a global network for 24 hour surveillance, we could have lost invaluable data. Maybe the whole message. The world has to be in on this.

Kitz stews. The delegation rumbles. Willie and Fisher realize they've been holding their breath. Ellie eyes Valerian. Her respect for him is still there.

Drumlin calmly holds up a printout.

DRUMLIN (continuing)
I have a little news. I just checked the signal for polarization modulation. I think there's a second message in there. Might even be.....a moving image.

The whole room is in absolute utter shock. Then chaos. Drumlin lords over it with a big gloating grin.

ELLIE
Punch it up, Willie.
(then quietly panics)
How'd we miss this? Huh? How?

WILLIE/FISHER
Maybe it's a "creature feature". Vegan "Sex-Ed"--

Ellie's not laughing. Willie punches up the big screen. PRIME NUMBERS scroll. Frank wheels to the command console.

Valerian pulls Ellie behind a row of data banks.

VALERIAN
Still "Miss Congeniality" I see. I thought you stopped eating razor blades for breakfast. Take it easy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERIAN (CONT'D)
You've hardly slept, you've already made the major discovery of this century, and if I hear you, you're on the verge of something bigger.

ELLIE
I have to put up with Drumlin--now this Kitz Cyborg. What the hell are you shilling for him for? Did the President send him?

VALERIAN
No, the President sent me---Kitz is is here on his own. But he can militarize this project. Got it? He's an over-achiever, just like you.

Ellie sags exhausted against data banks. He steadies her. She rests her head on his shoulder the way she used to.

ELLIE
We're going to screw it up, Pete. The answer to the most important question in the universe, and we are going to blow it.

VALERIAN
Not you. I envy you, El. You did it. You found the needle in the cosmic haystack--

ELLIE
You should have been here.

VALERIAN
Yeah.....You look good.

ELLIE
And you're still married.

RESUME: COMMAND CONTROL

The assembled focus on the big display. Strings of zeroes and ones fill the screen. A pattern forms.

ONSCREEN: 00000000111000001110000011100000000
00000001111100011111000111110000000
00000011111111011111110111111110000000

FRANK
This is how the signal transmits. Sequences of zeroes and ones form patterns--like a wire photo of white dots and black dots that construct an image--The signal can form numbers or words--even 3-D holograms.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Willie enlarges the patterns.

FRANK (continuing)
By using our decryption analysis with the new context recognizers--
"Hadden chips"--we can interpret the contents into the correct pattern--

Ellie and Valerian enter. She moves closer to the screen.

ELLIE
Throw a gray scale in it. Rotate the image 90 degrees--

Willie enters commands. ONSCREEN: a distinct black and white moving image forms. Grays define it even more.

Anticipation ripples. Valerian is mesmerised. Kitz is nervous. He whispers to his aide who makes a call on a hand radio. Drumlin is front row center. Riveted.

WILLIE
Doc, I've got an auxiliary sideband channel. I think it's audio.

A deep rumbling glissando of sounds joins the image, sliding up and down the spectrum. Other worldly. Eerie.

PAN THE FACES; each reflecting what they are witnessing. The first image of an alien being? Grotesque? With a warning? A threat? A new weapon?

KITZ
I must insist--anyone without Top Security clearance leave immediately--

The entire group SHUSHES him big time. Now faint swelling MUSIC heard. What? Ellie reaches over Willie and types more commands. The picture rotates, rectifies and focuses.

KITZ
What is this? What is going on?

DRUMLIN
It's a hoax! A goddamned expensive practical joke, that's what it is.

Drumlin roars with laughter. Others react astonished, more laughter. Disappointment. Ellie and Valerian watch in shock. Her discovery and dream crumbles.

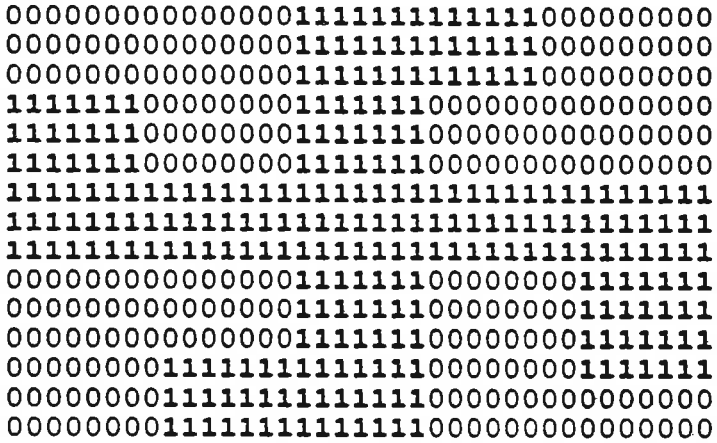
ON SCREEN: A black and white grainy image of a massive reviewing stand adorned with an immense Art Deco Eagle. Clutched in the eagle's concrete talons is a Swastika!

A scratchy German announcer speaks--

CONTINUED:

VALERIAN (translating)
The Fuehrer....welcomes the world to our German Fatherland for the opening of the 1936 Olympic Games..."

He fills the screen. The crowd cheers---ADOLF HITLER!



END ACT ONE CUT TO: BLACK

ACT II - "MACHINDO" FADE IN: EXT. CAMP DAVID - MORNING

SUPER: [0:7:00 HRS.] SECRET SERVICE jog with a HANDSOME WOMAN in her late 40's.

EXT. PAVILION - SAME TIME

A tangle of PRESS CORP, cameras and TECHNICIANS set up for the press conference. One JOURNALIST doodles. PUSH IN ON THE NOTEPAD: A UFO and an UGLY ALIEN CREATURE.

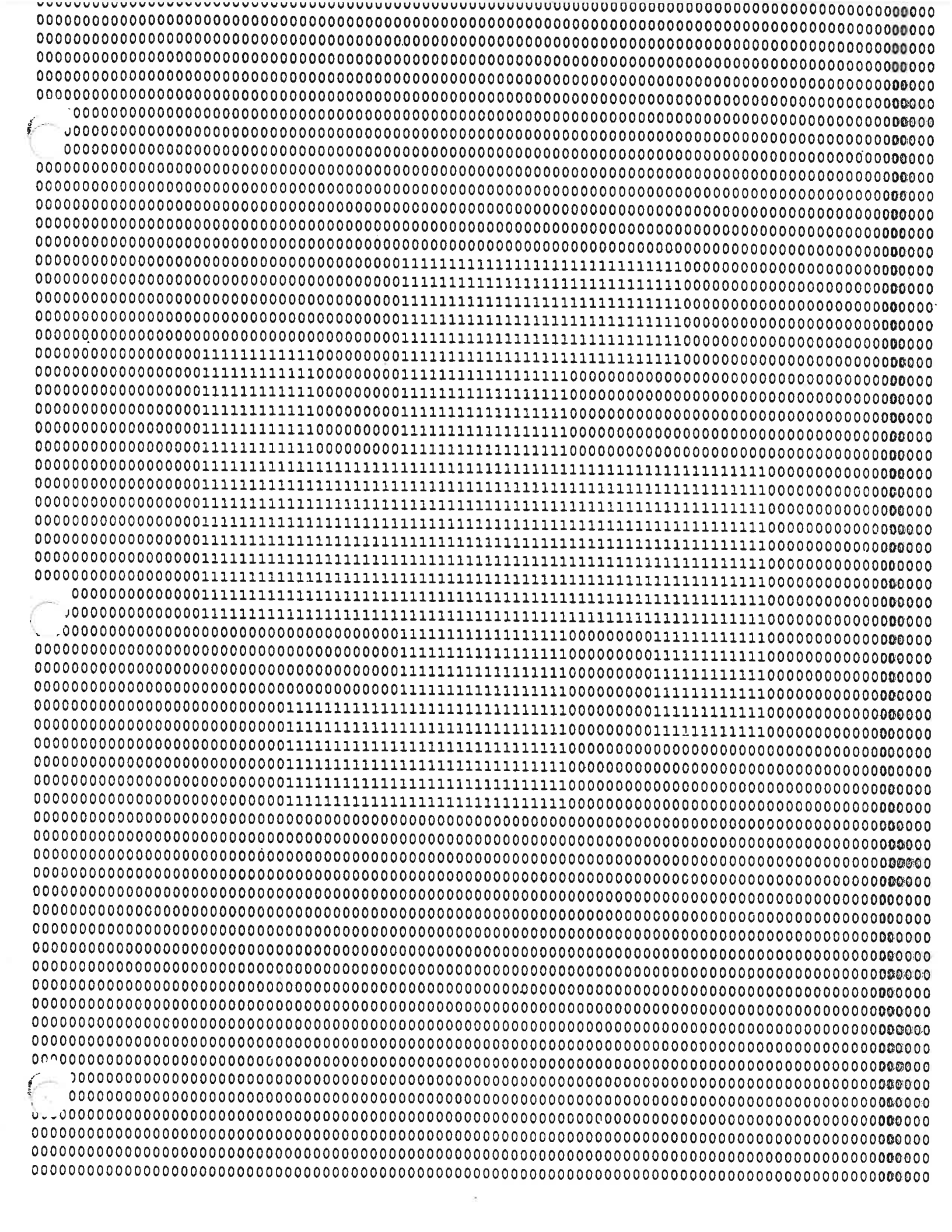
INT. PAVILLION LOUNGE - DAY

The decor is very "good ole boy" club. The handsome woman, now dressed in a suit--hair styled, pours coffee for a very haggard, very jet-lagged Peter Valerian. They watch a video tape of the Hitler transmission.

MS. PRESIDENT
Forty million people die defeating that megalomaniac and the first sign of intelligent life on earth we send to another civilization--<u>is</u> <u>Hitler</u>!!?

VALERIAN
With all due respect, Ms. President--
It wasn't intentional. The Hitler broadcast at the '36 Olympics was the first TV transmission of any power that went into space. TV signals fan all over the universe at the speed of light.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

The intercom buzzes. She checks the digital readout. She heads for the door. Valerian follows.

VALERIAN (continuing)
Twenty-six years later, Vega picks up Hitler--studies him--sends him back where it came from--Twenty-six years after that--Argus picks it up. Contact.

She pauses at the door--ramrod stiff--a horrible thought.

MS. PRESIDENT
Everything goes out there? All the crap on television? Hard Copy? Love Boat? Young and the Restless? People's Court? Wheel of Fortune? The Flintstones? Oh, God, my innaugural speech?

Valerian shakes his head in sympathy.

INT. MAIN PAVILLION - CONTINUING ACTION

As they enter. Kitz huddles with the CIA DIRECTOR huddling with three JOINT CHIEFS. Ms. President joins them.

Valerian eyes Palmer Joss musing at the garden doors. He appears disinterested.

MS. PRESIDENT
Kitz--does the CIA think this has has anything to do with UFO's?

CIA DIRECTOR
The company's position has always been--we have no good evidence we're being visited. No conclusive proof UFOS even exist. UFOS are a natural phenomena that can be explained or hoaxes...or mass psychological events.

Just like that. Poof. ELLIE ENTERS breathless--alone--with a heavy briefbag. Kitz is clearly irritated by Ellie's presence. Valerian greets her ahead of the others.

VALERIAN
I was getting worried about you. Where's Drumlin? Did you take an ice pick to him?

ELLIE (lopsided grin)
Not yet. He stayed at Argus. Things are happening fast, Pete--We just--

She sees Joss by the garden doors studying her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE (continuing)
What's Palmer Joss doing here? This is the National Security Council, not Sunday School.

VALERIAN
The President wants him in on this. He is the most powerful religious voice in the country. Now be nice.

ELLIE
Did he bring "God" with him too?

Palmer Joss acknowledges her with his down-home smile.

JOSS
(overhearing)
Oh, he's everywhere, I assure you.

Ellie blanches. Valerian's nerves fry. The President sweeps over.

MS. PRESIDENT
Dr. Arrowood--uh--way. First let me congratulate you on a splendid discovery. Peter says you have some new information for us?

She pulls a ream of printouts from her briefbag and UNFURLS the pages across the conference table.

ELLIE
Sorry I'm late, Ms. President, but I think we just hit the cosmic jackpot--

The gathered pore over the dense sequences of numbers. Joss sidles up beside Ellie showing keen interest.

ELLIE (continuing)
Drumlin found the Hitler signal underneath the prime numbers. Last night he uncovered a third message; incredibly rich in data.

JOSS
It's a "palimpsest". In ancient times when parchment was limited, a new message would be written over an old one on the same parchment. You're receiving "recycled paper."

Kitz and his end of the table ripple with laughter. Ellie gets her first closeup look at Joss; his down home smile.

ELLIE
You know your history, Mr. Joss.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERIAN
(politely correcting her)
Rev. Joss is worried about the impact the "message" may have on world religions.

ELLIE
This is a scientific discovery, Rev. Joss, not a question of religion.

JOSS (Will Rogers smile)
That is precisely the question. God doesn't need radio telescopes to send a message.

Valerian sees battle lines being drawn.

ELLIE
Who said it's a message from God. These prime numbers came in the radio spectrum to astronomers--not to the Pope. And not from from a burning bush or a pillar of fire--or some voice booming down from the sky--

JOSS
But a voice in the sky is just what you say you've found.

Ellie stops to catch her breath on that one. Joss pours her a cup of coffee. He's so disarming.

ELLIE
Prime numbers and Hitler? Your God has quite a sense of humor.

JOSS
God can have any sense he wants.

Valerian delivers the President in the knick of time.

MS. PRESIDENT
Well? What does it say? Is there any threat we should be concerned about?

ELLIE
We don't know, exactly. We're on page ten thousand, four hundred and thirteen. And it's still coming.

Kitz comes alive. He speaks quietly to the CIA Director.

ELLIE (continuing)
Our decryption analysis indicates it's a book of instructions--a plan--
--to build some kind of machine.

CONTINUED:

A lit match into a haystack. Everybody talks at once.

KITZ
I was right. We don't want the Chinese or the Japanese and the Germans getting access to this. It could be a bomb--a doomsday device--a viral pollutant--

VALERIAN
Maybe something's wrong on Vega. They're looking for a new world.

CIA DIRECTOR
Yes and Earth would suit them just find so they send a "trojan horse". Maybe choosing Hitler is no accident.

JOSS
Armageddon.

MS. PRESIDENT
Oh my god--

ELLIE
(politely facetious)
A hundred bucks says it's Moses with "ten billion <u>new</u> commandments.

Joss nods--impressed. Valerian marvels at Ellie's uncanny power to control a group of dominant Men.

ELLIE (continuing)
Without a "primer" --a "Rosetta Stone" to decode the message, no one knows what the machine's supposed to do or how to build it. There's no way the alien civilization can know if we've even received their signal. If we don't like the contents, we don't have to respond. And if they mean us harm, they can get here in about twenty-six years. I doubt there's anything we can do to protect ourselves by then--They're too far ahead of us--

She delivers her last words at Kitz then turns on Joss.

ELLIE (continuing)
You won't find these plans in the Old Testament. And Revelations doesn't mention life on other planets, does it Joss--?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSS
And stars can't send messages can they, Dr. Arroway? Someone is sending it. When you Scientists decode the message, will it end 'Yours truly, God', or "Sincerely the Devil?'

MS. PRESIDENT
These are complicated issues for all of us. Things are happening too damn fast. Too many maybes.

JOSS
(maneuvering, fishing)
How would you respond, Dr. Arroway? What answer would you send back?

Ellie panics. She looks to Valerian who nods assurance.

ELLIE
None. But if we're asked to-- we should respond as a species. Not as Americans, Muslims or Christians--but united as humans. "Earthlings".

Ellie realizes she's been holding Valerian's arm the entire speech. Silence....even Joss is moved.

MS. PRESIDENT
On the night of my election, an old friend said to me, "So what're you going to do when the Boys on the hill start looking up your skirt?"

Nervous laughter around the room.

MS. PRESIDENT (continuing)
I wasn't prepared for that one. I've got a trillion dollar deficit --A civil war in Iraq--four major Japanese banks failed in the last week--Eastern Europe is starving. We've got a city of homeless in D.C. that stretches from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial--disease is killing more people than guns--And that's my day before breakfast. But this administration did not prepare for visitors from outer space--

Ellie can't hide her fear of defeat. She starts packing up her data. Ms. President takes her hand--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MS.PRESIDENT (continuing)
--except to say, you have the support of this office and the entire United States government.--Just keep that global network of yours together and crack this thing.

Ellie beams, hugging her, forgetting all decorum. Joss parts them taking each by the hand.

JOSS
Let us pray for strength and guidance in this hour of man's greatest crisis.

MS.PRESIDENT
Better not leave "woman" out of the equation, Palmer. I am running the country--and Arroway here seems to be running the planet.

Ellie blushes her lopsided grin. Joss realizes he's got his spiritual hands full. Ellie will be his greatest challenge.

MS. PRESIDENT (continuing)
Let's just pray this Hitler business doesn't get out of hand.

INSERT TV: "CNN WORLD NEWS" - WE SLAM INTO:

50 arms snap the air in Nazi salute.

SPACE-ARYANS
SEIG HEILLLL! SEIG HEILLL!

New Nazi flags wave; A Swastika criss-crosses planet earth.

CNN ANNOUNCER (TV)
The Nazi sect, who call themselves "Space-Aryans" held a public rally--claiming Hitler was abducted by Aliens after World War Two--

The "SPACE-ARYANS" wear a black crash helmets with Earth Swastika, mylar jumpsuit and cycle boots. One holds up a famous black and white photo of a UFO.

CNN ANNOUNCER (TV CONT'D)
to Vega where he raised the Fourth Reich. They claim Hitler's armies are coming to Earth to "eliminate all mongrel races--" This is--

CUT TO:

QUICK CUTS: TV ANNOUNCERS AROUND THE WORLD

FROM BERLIN:

ANNOUNCER (TV)
Hitler's alive and well and building flying saucers in space?

Neo-Nazis clash with Police at the Vandenberg gate.

FROM ITALY:

ANNOUNCER#2 (TV)
Voices from heaven? The Pope ponders at the Vatican.

Thousands wait in Vatican square for the Pope to appear.

FROM D.C.

ANNOUNCER #3 (TV)
The President warns the world, "The Aliens are coming! The Aliens are coming!"

Sound bytes from the President's press conference. Press Corps yell out absurd questions. "Do they speak English?" -- "Are we being invaded by flying saucers?" "Do we have to pay social security on extra-terrestrial Aliens?"

The sober look on President Lasker's face quiets them.

MS. PRESIDENT (ON TV)
I assure you and the world this is no Orson Welles prank. I am calling upon the international science community, the United Nations Security Council, and all heads of state and church to join together in a "World Message Consortium"--

WIDEN TO: SAME WALL OF TV MONITORS - SAME UNKNOWN LOCATION

IN SILHOUETTE, the same Man regales at the reactions around the world. On his center monitor, PRIME NUMBERS scroll by.

EXT. NEW MEXICO DESERT - AERIAL VIEW - LATE AFTERNOON

The road leading to Argus is jammed with vehicles, RV's, Vans, Busses--as far as the eye can see. MORE PEOPLE walk on the side of the road. Woodstock 1999! THE VIEW CLIMBS REVEALING: Campfires, BBQ's, Tents of all shape and sizes litter the plains surrounding the array of telescopes.

CNN ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
--and here in New Mexico, the Argus site has become a new Mecca for the young, old, rich, poor--

CUT TO:

EXT. ARGUS MAIN ENTRANCE - CONTINUING ACTION

The CNN ANCHORWOMAN talks on camera near the heavily guarded checkpoint entrance to Argus.

CNN ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
--the curious, the religious--
from around the globe. All seeking
the answer to the question of the
ages; "what does the message from
space say?" This is not "Sci-Fi
Theatre"--this is for real. And
it's the best show in town.

As she speaks; WE SEE: A YOUNG TEENAGE COUPLE pushing a ragged stroller with their infant beside the highway.

MYSTICS FROM TAOS kneel by the gate chanting to the heavens. NUNS trek along, on foot in single file, singing in latin.

NAVAJO and TAOS INDIANS from the nearby Reservations sell string ties and scalp gallon jugs of water for "$10".

ENLISTED MEN & WOMEN from Davis AFB pass out bubblegum and chewing tobacco and surplus cheese from the back of a military van.

VENDORS hawk food and Space Souvenirs. Posters and placards of "Aliens" inspired by movies and comic books.

WE FOLLOW TWO GOVT. AGENCY MOTORPOOL CARS

Snaking through the crowd. From the rear car, A MAN with a raucous grin, puffing a Gauloise, hails a Vendor with his heavy Russian accent; VASILY GREGOROVICH LUNACHARSKY, V.J. for short; a brilliant nuclear physicist.

V.J.
How much is for that one there?

A T-SHIRT VENDOR holds up one--Madonna in the buff. A caption: "GREETINGS FROM EARTH - I DO LITTLE GREEN MEN".

VENDOR
Fifty bucks.

V.J.
Govno (shit). I saw the identical
garment for thirty dollars not
half a kilometer back--

The Vendor shrugs and moves on. V.J. grabs the T-shirt and shoves money in the Vendor's hands.

VENDOR
Don't washit'n hot water, pal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INSIDE THE CAR - CONTINUING ACTION

Ellie cracks up in the backseat. Valerian chuckles up front with a young POOL DRIVER. V.J. models the shirt.

V.J.
In a true free-enterprise system, I could purchase Madonna for fifteen dollars-maybe twelve ninety-five.

V.J. headed the laser weapons labs for the former USSR; but to Ellie, he's a jolly giant who loves the stars.

ELLIE
V.J., what is it with you Eastern bloc types? History is being made right outside your window and you fixate on "big american breasts".
(with genuine affection)
I have truly missed you.

V.J. kisses her hand.

V.J. (continuing)
Oh the wasted years when I could defect and spill our nuclear secrets. And now I merely step on a plane, hope the pilot has purchased sufficient fuel on the black market --enjoy the inflight x-rated video-- and poof, I am in America!

He pulls two bottles of coveted Russian vodka from his flight bag, one for Valerian, one for Ellie.

V.J.
Why didn't you marry her, "Petr"? She is single and I am a long way from home.

VALERIAN
We all are, my friend....

Valerian catches Ellie's eye in the rearview mirror. "Why didn't he?" They marvel at the views outside the windows.

V.J.
We shall drink to your little message, Ellie--Ravza! Look! <u>You have started a revolution</u>!

THEIR POV - MOVING BY THE CROWDS

The mass of humanity on a pilgrimage toward the giant Argus radio telescopes filling the horizon.

ELLIE
What if we're too stupid to decode it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A WILD-EYED MAN throws himself on the hood pressing his face against the windshield--completely panicked.

WILD MAN
Watch the skies! Watch the skies!

Then he's gone, running through the crowd yelling. Ahead, door opens on their lead Security car. A SECRET SERVICE AGENT follows the Wild Man.

Ellie, Valerian and V.J. trade glances. The young Driver is visibly spooked. V.J. pours him a nip of vodka.

EXT. ARGUS ENTRANCE - CONTINUING ACTION

PREACHERS and RELIGIOUS FANATICISTS speak to gatherings all along the new Cyclone fence surrounding Argus. A banner reads "There are Aliens Among Us".

A Crowd concentrates around A YOUNG MAN speaking on a portable stage. We will call him JOSEPH. He has the appeal of a Rock Star--a Messiah. His t-shirt depicts the Earth being struck by a lightning bolt; a "chiliast" sign. Other FOLLOWERS flank him wearing the same insignia.

JOSEPH
The coming of the Millenium will be the end for all sinners on Earth. God has fulfilled his promise to send Christ back down from heaven to purge the world himself---

Ellie's convoy is stopped near the gate by the crush of people around Joseph. SECURITY AGENTS in the lead car climb out scanning the crowd.

Ellie cracks her window to listen.

HER POV - JOSEPH

JOSEPH
God communicates with we who have faith. But the Scientists tell us God doesn't exist!

The crowd reacts thunderous. V.J. scoffs in Russian.

ELLIE
I want to hear this one---

Ellie steps out beside the car trying to get a better view. A half smile of wonderment on her lips. A Security Man flanks her already on his radio.

SECURITY MAN (radio)
Get the gate clear. We're coming in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSEPH RAILS at the telescopes rousing the growing crowd.

JOSEPH (continuing)
--I don't know what the message from the heavens says--but I know the politicians and the scientists are holding out on us! Lying to us the way they always do! I castigate them! Are these the kind of people you want talking to God for you? --

Ellie is stunned by the thunderous "NOOO!" from the crowd.

CROWD MEMBERS shake the fence angrily. AFS SECURITY spread out along the perimeter.

The Security Man ushers Ellie toward the car. Valerian gets out with V.J. to grab Ellie back inside.

VALERIAN
(to the Driver)
Let's go--

The Driver is frozen watching the crowd get uglier.

JOSEPH spots Ellie, V.J. and Valerian at their car. Joseph and Ellie lock on each other through the crowd. Polarized. Enemies. He points right at her--The crowd turns.

JOSEPH
The evil in this place will be stopped. I swear it!

THE CROWD RIOTS! Igniting in a maddening wave of fury rushing the car--the gates--the fence. Hurling bottles, rocks and insults--

One Security Man gets decked. The other Two shield Ellie's car--waving them to move!

VALERIAN SHOVES ELLIE down in the backseat. Valerian pushes the young driver over taking the wheel.

V.J. DECKS TWO RIOTERS--seemingly enjoying the fray. He smashes his Vodka bottle on a Joseph follower.

VALERIAN PULLS UP beside him, racing the engine--honking crazed--scaring some of the rioters back.

VALERIAN
Get it! C'monnnnn!

V.J. JUMPS IN BACK covering Ellie. Valerian speeds away. Bottles pelting the car. People leaping out of the way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INSIDE - LOOKING FORWARD

V.J. flattens Ellie on the floor. Valerian twists and turns through the mob behind the lead car. Their car rocks! Rioters--trying to turn it over!

A ROCK CRACKS THE WINDSHIELD!

Ellie looks up from the floor mesmerised by the rage in faces at the shattered side windows--pounding the roof--

AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE - CONTINUING ACTION

From inside the fence, SECURITY PERSONEL turn fire hoses on the crowds, the powerful sprays knocking them to the ground --tumbling them from the fence--

A PHALANX OF AFS BERETS rush from the open gate into the crowd--forming a human gauntlet.

WE FOLLOW ELLIE'S CARS - RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

Rioters pelting the Berets and the cars with rocks and bottles. Berets push the Rioters back.

JOSEPH leads a "suicide squad" breaking through to the gate blocking the road--

FIRE HOSES bear down--POWERFUL STREAMS literally dashing Joseph and his Squad--tumbling them along the road--

--as Ellie's cars speed through the gates to safety.

THE RIOT - AERIAL VIEW

AFS HELICOPTERS buzz the mob fanning floodlights. Bullhorns squeal as Blue Berets disperse the crowd.

A BLAST OF WATER WIPES THE SCREEN TO:

INT. ARGUS - COMMAND CONTROL - SUNSET

Outside the panorama window, searchlights fan, copters fly by. Crowds chant frightening rythms. Ellie enters with Valerian and V.J. Freaked. Siege conditions prevail.

Willie and Fisher look like Zombies. Frank dozes in his wheelchair. Candy wrappers, soda cans, coffee cups--everyhwere. She gives Willie a grim hug.

WILLIE
Dr. Arroway--has the world gone completely nuts out there?

ELLIE
They think the sky is falling, Willie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Willie and Fisher are both near collapse.

VALERIAN
Get some sleep. We'll take it.

DRUMLIN; hunched at the command console, works in spite of fatigue. He spots V.J. He sours.

DRUMLIN
Lunacharsky? Who the hell let you in my country?!! We wasted billions of dollars on defense trying to keep this commie from blowing up the world.

V.J.
Ah, Drumleen. See. It worked. Eleanor convinced your President to invite me. Since I no longer have a country--I accepted.

Drumlin drills Ellie with blistering eyes. She demures--

ELLIE
V.J.'s the "Message" rep for the former Soviet bloc. Seven telescopes.

V.J.
So--I shall start reviewing your analysis of the signal. Perhaps you missed something, David.

V.J. nonchalantly takes over the command console, clearly enjoying his affect on Drumlin.

DRUMLIN
We've repeated. The message cycled back to page one. There's a fourth level to this message somewhere--

Ellie looks at the screen incredulous. Zeroes and ones fly by in a continuous blur.

ELLIE
How can it recycle? We haven't got the primer yet. We can't read a word. Maybe we are the "Morons of the Universe."

V.J.
At least the "ghetto of the galaxy"-- eh "Comrade".

Drumilin's been at it too long. He blows!

DRUMILIN
I'm not your goddamn "comrade"!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Copters roar overhead. The chanting amplifies outside. Ellie can't take it anymore. She pushes by Valerian--she hesitates searching his eyes--for love and comfort. She storms out.

Valerian stares the two men down like an angry father.

VALERIAN
This message did not travel twenty-six light years through space from another civilization for Ellie to discover just so two old burnouts could re-fight the cold war.

Silence. Numbers scroll. Droning pulses of the signal. And the chanting. The constant chanting outside.

INT. ELLIE'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Exhausted. 3 days no sleep, Ellie plops, almost in stupor, staring at the prime numbers scrolling across her terminal.

Her treasured Peanut butter lid dangles from its hook above her monitor. Ellie spins it--a photo inside of her father strobes--animating his smile. Youthful. Eternal.

ELLIE
Well Dad, they're trying to teach us ants the alphabet.

Emotions surge up. Her shoulders quake as the sobs come. She wants to be a little girl again curled in his arms.

ELLIE'S WALL TV - LATER

Satcom channel search cruises mindlessly; to CNN: WORLD NEWS - "MESSAGE FROM SPACE?" flashes up. Wolf Blitzer reports from the Taj Majal. Behind him, thousands of followers chant.

WOLF (TV)
With church attendance at record highs all over the world, and religious shrines overrun with patrons, "apparitions of Vishnu" have been reported here in India and Buddha has been seen in Japan--

REVEAL: ELLIE; collapsed in her "sleep chair", fully clothed, buried in her "White noise" headphones.

SWITCH: The same "HADDEN" LOGO that we see all over the Argus equipment pops up promoting "SOL HADDEN'S BABYLON" --an adult theme park.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ADULTS, mostly WOMEN, flock through the Ishtar gate. Patrons wear "Babylonian" dress. MUSCLE BOUND MEN parade for women to choose. Disneyland meets Chippendales.

ANNOUNCER (TV)
Come to Babylon. Experience the excitement of the past--AND the pleasures---

A Schwarzenegger clone fights Gladiators. "Working Girls" in diaphanous gowns slave over him after a mock kill.

ANNOUNCER (continuing)
Come to Babylon. Orgies begin at 11. Exit 66 on the L.I.E. A division of Hadden Entertainment. Stay tuned for "Sex Fantasy Challenge".

The HADDEN logo again appears. Ellie throws her socks at the screen.

SWITCH: TBC/TURNER

The kindly face of PALMER JOSS appears; unkempt good looks. He sits in a rustic homey living room, the perfect rugged American, the charm of Will Rogers.

JOSS (TV)
I have seen God face to face.

Ellie studies him. There is an "unphoney" quality to him. She's drawn to this man who "hankers" for a simpler age.

JOSS (TV CONT'D)
Because of this experience, I will not worship the golden calf of Science. Nor will I tolerate fanatics and the religious right who bend God's word to pay for their luxury jets and real estate empires or wage war. As human beings we have a choice to make.....

INT. SAME WALL OF TV'S - SAME UNKNOWN LOCATION - SAME TIME

TV from all over the world. We're watching Joss.

JOSS (TV CONT'D)
--We can either stagnate as a species--with our old tribal hatreds tearing us apart; or we can embrace a new global faith in our Creator--and survive...

SOL HADDEN leans into view. The array of monitors reflecting on his glasses preventing a clear image of him as he studies the prime numbers still counting out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

1021 1031 1033 1039 1049

His infrared finger extensions fly over the keys.

DISPLAY: MCI MAIL: Dr. E.Arroway IAU-SETI Argus Project Socorro, New Mexico: Greetings from Vega. For your free Vegan Primer, call 1-800-BABYLON, that's 1-800-BABYLON

His pointy finger on his left hand selects "SEND".

PRIME NUMBERS REFLECTING ON HIS GLASSES DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEW MEXICO HIGHWAY - DAWN

Prime numbers become white lines on two-lane blacktop. Streaming by. Hypnotic. WE HEAR: THE LOW DRONING WHINE OF TIRES ON PAVEMENT. A 1957 THUNDERBIRD speeds by--

Ellie drives. Her few moments of freedom. She's on the car phone, making nice, dreading every word.

ELLIE
--I can't come this weekend, Mom. I'm kinda busy---

INTERCUT: RETIREMENT HOME - NIGHT

Tired with age, rambling, Ellie's MOTHER stares listlessly at TV in her wheelchair on the phone, trying to needle point at the same time. Her tiny room has a few pictures from the past; including Ellie and her Father at the zoo.

MOTHER
I know. I know. I read all about you. None of the Girls at my card table saw you on the news, but I told them you were right there at the Whitehouse--Is the President as nice as she seems on TV?

RESUME: ELLIE

Her Mother drones like the "white noise" of the road.

ELLIE
Yes, Mom, she's nice. It was Camp David, Mom. You okay?

Severe static cuts in and out---

MOTHER (V.O. PHONE)
Ellie--I lost you--Ellie--?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TO MOTHER

MOTHER
(half to herself)
Well, I never had you when your father was alive and I never got you back after he died--

TO ELLIE

ELLIE
Mom? I can't talk now, okay? I'll call you later--

TO MOTHER

MOTHER
We have to talk about something when you get here. The Preacher said you're degrading God with this Vega business. I do wish you could be like other girls--

TO ELLIE

ELLIE
Mom--I said--I'm not coming--
I'm a grown--

MOTHER (V.O. PHONE)
Ellie, are you talking to God?

The connection cuts out. Ellie hangs up and accelerates.

HER POV - TWO LANE BLACKTOP

There in the headlights, an amazing sight--**Each side of the road is lined with Rabbits**! A religious ritual of Rabbit ears rearing up to watch the strange apparition speeding by.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEW YORK - L.I. EXPRESSWAY - DUSK

Ellie speeds by in a rent car. Again she's on the phone.

ELLIE
I'll be back tonight--Pete. Just tell everybody I'm going to see my Mother, okay?

Static. Tires hum. White noise. An exit sign blows by.

"BABYLON - NEXT EXIT"

A HUGE MULTIMEDIA ELECTRONIC BILLBOARD depicting "SOL HADDEN'S BABYLON" fantasy theme park points the way.

CUT TO:

EXT. BABYLON - DUSK

A perfect reproduction of Bablyon, complete with the hanging gardens; one of the seven wonders of the world.

AT THE ENLIL GATE

Marked "PRIVATE", a HANDSOME MUSCLED SOLDIER, in authentic Babylonian costume, stops Ellie's car and opens her door. He's flanked by an entire HONOR GUARD of beefcake.

SOLDIER
The Emperor is expecting you.

Ellie flushes red at the gorgeous hunks surrounding her.

EXT. ISHTARIAN WAY - DUSK

We follow Ellie and her Honor Guard. An eye feast. TOURISTS in costume blend with the "RE-ENACTORS". They pass a huge open bath. Women engage in open foreplay with more of the Hunk Soldiers--sans armor.

Ellie is stunned. She taps her 'SOLDIER' on his helmet.

ELLIE
Do you pass out historically authentic condoms, General?

The Soldier smiles and nods looking her up and down.

INT. EMPEROR'S PALACE - AN ELEVATOR - LATER

Babylonian doors open REVEALING: a huge solarium with a 360 degree view of Babylon. Authentic ancient artifacts and statues abound. Sol Hadden's Penthouse.

Her Soldier leads her in.

SOLDIER
Emperor Sol will be with you, soon. Care for a refreshment?

He shows her an array of exotic drinks and passion fruit.

ELLIE
Think I'll pass on the fertility rites,

Her Soldier "chest salutes." She sneaks a look at his thick legs and buns under his military skirt as he exits.

BEHIND A TWO WAY GLASS WALL

Hadden's silhouette watches Ellie only inches away. A willing voyeur. His wall of TV monitors is visible behind him. The mystery location at last!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellie takes in the view. The Chariot races are beginning 40 stories below. Cheers ECHO!

HADDEN (O.C.)
It's a half hour by train from mid-town Manhattan to the Ishtar gate.

Ellie whirls. She's startled by the short, bearded, unassuming man who approaches; SOL HADDEN, forty-something, white shirt, tie, Ross Perot crew cut--Only his dark prismatic glasses that change with the light blow his otherwise "straight arrow" "Mega-Nerd" looks. His voice is surprisingly musical. In fact, he talks in "fifths".

HADDEN (continuing)
Oh. Sorry. I never understand how anyone can be afraid of me.

He talks on--as if afraid Ellie might not like him.

HADDEN (continuing)
During the day, we have all the school children and museum tours we can handle. It's very educational. And--it's free.....That's why the State and City Fathers let me stay in business--for the moment. At night the adults take over. No crime. No Graffiti. Our streets are safe--

ELLIE
--and so are the "prostitutes"?

HADDEN
(blushing like a schoolboy)
I heard you ask tough questions. Dr. Arroway, our orgies are very therapeutic. Why don't you stay tonight and see for yourself. My guest, of course.

ELLIE
I'd rather be eaten by lions.

HADDEN
That can be arranged.

He claps his hands. Ellie half-expects a lion to jump out. The slanted glass wall rises silently, revealing Hadden's playroom and his wall of monitors. He leads her to it.

Models of spacecraft hang from the ceiling. They circle an exotic orbiting space station design model. She marvels at the world of events and data at his electronic doorstep.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HADDEN
You're a good sport to come to my so-called "den of iniquity". It tells me how far you're willing to go to find the truth.

ELLIE
A bad habit I got from my father.

HADDEN
Who knows you're here?

ELLIE
I told everyone I was going to visit my mother. I'm way over the line, her Sol. I don't get the Babylon side of you, but I have great respect for you as an engineer. You practically built our entire system. We never would have caught the message without "Hadden" chips and software....
(upfront and direct)
So--do you have some data on the primer--or not?

As she speaks, Hadden punches up the prime numbers on each TV. Ellie is amazed--but not surprised.

ELLIE
Sol, you old pirate, you--You compromised our security codes.

HADDEN
(modest shrug)
I'm a hell of an engineer--
You want to know where "the primer" is--I want to build the machine.

Ellie is at a loss. She almost laughs.

HADDEN
(defensive)
This isn't a job for aerospace tool and die hackers. It's going to require visionary engineering.

ELLIE
Who gets to build the machine isn't up to me, Sol. It's an international decision. You know that--

HADDEN
Of course I know that. I'm already lobbying through the usual channels of influence and corruption.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

Ellie is wary. Maybe she's about to be corrupted too.

HADDEN (continuing)
There are plenty of religous leaders, governments and corporations on this planet that would like to see me gone. It's only a matter of time before they shut Babylon down. I've got more money than I know what to do with--my third wife hates me-- So--I figure it's time to go.

ELLIE
Go?...Where, Sol?

HADDEN
Ah, ah, ah. Secret.

He lingers beside the exotic space station mockup.

HADDEN (continuing)
But before I leave, I want to do something important. Something worthy. So that hundreds of years from now, people will look back and maybe be glad I was around. Let me build the machine, please?

ELLIE
We can't build it until we can decrypt it. Help us find the primer-- --and maybe I'll put in a good word.

She can't believe she even said that. Hadden seems hurt.

HADDEN
"Maybe?"--I'll build it at cost.

ELLIE
(impressed)
An offer no government can refuse.

Hadden bows meekly. Ellie takes the opening and counters.

ELLIE
The primer first, Sol. No promises.

No problem. He points his infra-red sensor at his keyboard and engages "."-- The wall of monitors go black.

ON MONITOR #1: The prime number "1" appears. Followed by zeroes and ones forming a pictograph.

0000110000110000
0000110000110000
0000111111110000
0000110000110000
0000110000110000

ELLIE
"H"...One is "H". Hydrogen. Hydrogen is element "one" on the periodic table of elements. The simplest one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hadden gestures. "Elementary". Piqued, Ellie moves to his keyboard and types in a command.

ELLIE
Let's try an even number.

ON MONITOR #2: She types "92". A pictograph scrolls.

0000011000011100000
0000011000011100000
0000011000011100000
0000011000011100000
0000001111111000000

ELLIE
"U". Uranium. Number 92 on the table. Okay, we're looking good. The Vegans know their elements. You could've programmed it, Sol.

She turns on him accusatory. He laughs a singsong cackle.

HADDEN
True--but I'm in enough trouble already. Look at each page break in the message. There's something there.

ELLIE
Yeah, a "period".

HADDEN
Not if you think like a Vegan.

Silence. Ellie considers. Racing her brain--

ELLIE
There is no separate primer in the message--because--it's on every page--so the recipient can decipher what it says--even if we don't get the whole message---?

Hadden entertains himself with his space station model finding just the right spot for a miniature pool table. The name on the side of the station is "METHUSELAH".

HADDEN
It's your message, Dr. Arroway; you do the honors.
(points to videophone)
I already programmed Argus in. Just punch "A" for "Ant".

Ellie shoots him a look. "Who is this guy?". She dials the video phone on the console. A monitor spews prompts.

WILLIE pops into view.

WILLIE (VID PHONE)
Argus control--Whoa!--Where are you? That's some nursing home.

Hadden's penthouse spreads behind her.

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
Okay--okay, I didn't visit my sick Mother. I'm---with my new "best friend", Sol Hadden.

Valerian leans into view. He pales.

VALERIAN (VIDPHONE)
You went to Babylon? To Hadden? Drumlin's going to kill me-- then you--

V.J. (VIDPHONE)
(sticks his head in view)
Haddeen. He is why I love America and why Communism failed.

ELLIE
Okay--okay--We can talk about it later. Right now I want you to re-run the context analysis on the "page end" sequences only. The "periods could be "windows" to the primer. Interface the data on this channel--

VALERIAN (V.O. VIDPHONE)
(still skeptical)
Ellie....? Okay--okay. Whatever you say. Interfacing now--

The phone screen goes black. Hadden moves to Ellie. He fingers a command. At once the 50 monitors sync into a giant vidscreen. Ellie looks at her palms. She's sweating.

ELLIE
It'll take the computers about 30 seconds to run the analysis.

ONSCREEN: PROMPT: WORKING, WORKING....BATCH FILES DETECTED

Pages of "zeroes and ones" scroll up and stop. The little black box period at the end of the page ENHANCES LARGER like a black hole filling the screen. Suddenly, MORE ZEROES AND ONES rush at us from the center of the box.

Hadden and Ellie. Silhouetted against the big screen. As if being sucked into a blackhole of numbers.

ELLIE
Pete! Are you getting this!

INTERCUT: ARGUS - CONTINUING ACTION

Valerian, Willie, and V.J. watch the same image rushing at them. Fear. Wonder in their faces. Drumlin comes running in. Other Scientists are glued to the array of monitors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DRUMLIN
(instinctive)
This is it---the Primer!

FRANK
(wheeling in)
If that Hitler guys shows up again I am outta here.

ARGUS SCREEN: THE PRIMER APPEARS!

Detailed computer graphic 3D renderings of DECODED PLANS FOR A MACHINE scan out!

INTERCUT: BABYLON SCREEN: THE MACHINE SCANS OUT

View upon view--page after page. Ellie is bedazzled as waves of plans and exploded views appear!

HADDEN
A spacecraft. Some kind of starship--

Suddenly the spacecraft extends right OFF THE SCREEN and into a HOLOGRAM filling the room! Hadden and Ellie can literally walk around and through the 3-D view!

ELLIE
Oh, my.....OH..OHHH!! OZ....

The geometric design of the craft is simple; a DODECAHEDRON ("Dodec"); a solid figure with 12 faces, surrounded by three concentric spherical shells. When completed, the machine will look from the outside like an "armillary sphere" of Renaissance astronomers. An organic look--as if the craft was grown instead of built.

The most revealing view of all is amidships--5 seats sit in a circle facing each other.

HADDEN
Look, seats! Five! Five travelers--
(a sudden chill)
Are "they" coming or are "we" going?

Ellie is literally standing in the middle of the pulsing design facing the chairs--total exhilaration.

ELLIE
These are for us. We're going!

INTERCUT: ARGUS - SAME TIME

The same hologram fills the control room. Valerian, Drumilin and V.J. argue in the center of the crew area.

VALERIAN
Could be a trasnporter. Maybe the ETI's are coming here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DRUMLIN
Naw, there's no controls. It's some kind of trap. Maybe they're collecting specimens--Us!

V.J.
No my old enemy--my brother. It's no weapon. You do not place five seats in a bomb. It's an invitation to go to the stars!

V.J. dances Drumlin around who curses the hologram.

RESUME: HADDEN AND ELLIE

The "Dodec" explodes itself and puts itself back together again piece by piece. Prime numbers appear with atomic numbers on the pieces. Step by step assembly instructions.

HADDEN
Something's going to happen to whoever's sitting in those chairs when the machine is activated. And the competition is going to be fierce for who gets to go.

His tone is chilling. She wants to go. It radiates off her. She stands in the center--picking a seat.

ELLIE
You want a window--or an aisle?

THE HOLOGRAM UPENDS ITSELF and barrel rolls around Ellie--showing off for the "Earthlings".

WE ACCELERATE INTO THE MACHINE for a computer graphic tour as only a computer can gives us. Bending, turning, exploring it like the inside of a Nautilus shell, multi-chambered, organic, alive. WE FREEZE AND:

DISSOLVE TO:

MACHINE DIAGRAMS MUSIC: "SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

WE REVEAL: The diagrams in an eight-volume "coffee table" book set. The pages roll at us.

WE SEE THE MACHINE BOOK IN THE HANDS OF:

A CLASSROOM OF SIXTH GRADERS; in Japan, France, Germany Brazil and America. Each book cover has the word "Machine" in the appropriate language. Japanese is the coolest--

"M A C H I N D O"

A JAPANESE GIRL poses in a "MACHINDO" T-shirt. She holds holds a Chrysanthemum next to a cross-section diagram of the machine--startling simlarities.

CUT TO:

MACHINE MONTAGE CONT'D:

ON TV - DAVID LETTERMAN opens the book. A cheesey ALIEN CLAW snaps out grabbing his nose--poking his eyes--

IN THE PENTAGON - KITZ and JOINT CHIEFS have the diagrams up in the war room.

IN ROME - THE VATICAN: A procession of VATICAN OFFICIALS proceed down a corridor. One carries the Machine book. They enter the Pope's study. HIS IMMINENCE is waiting.

IN A REMOTE FARMHOUSE - JOSEPH and his "Chiliast Terrorists" study the plans in a dingy kitchen. Other FOLLOWERS watch at windows. All with automatic weapons. Their war room.

INSERT: TV - LARRY KING LIVE; Larry grills Ellie.

ELLIE
I think it's dangerous not to build the Machine. I would be ashamed of our planet if we turned our back on our future.

EXT. U. N. - NEW YORK - DAY

Ellie signs autographs in the Machine book for a bevvy of fans. The last book she signs belongs to Joseph! She looks up startled. "Please to meet you. Hope you guess my name".

He disappears into the crowd. Valerian hurries Ellie inside.

INT. U.N. - MAIN AUDITORIUM - DAY

Ms. President Lasker and other WORLD LEADERS sign a historic document before a large rendering of the "Machine". Thundering applause! Cameras flash--

MS. PRESIDENT (p.a.)
Let the record show than no psychic, or prophet, no fortune teller or astrologer predicted this historic message or the Machine. We have been invited to the stars! Today we challenge our species, to come together as the People of Earth to accept this invitation! To unite to build a machine with new technologies from across the galaxy--to reach for the stars--

She joins hands with all the leaders.

MS. PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
WE ARE ALL HUMANS!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IN THE GALLERY - CONTINUING ACTION

Ellie and Valerian applaud. The energy is intoxicating.

ELLIE
Would you go Pete? If you're one of the five to get a seat, would you take it?

VALERIAN
Even if I never come back?

ELLIE
Even if it means death or never seeing earth again I want to go.

Valerian takes her all in. Still amazed at her "being".

VALERIAN
There's only five seats for the whole world, Ellie--and only one American--Kitz and Joss are on the selection committee--

ELLIE
(dauntless)
"Sergeant Rock and The God squad." Joss doesn't even believe in the speed of light. Peter, I have to be on that thing when they flip the switch.

He eyes hers. Ellie. Eternally determined. Since when did anything stop her? He holds her close. Deeply sincere.

VALERIAN
I'm happy just to look at the stars, El, but you won't be happy 'til you touch them, will you--You are something. I'll do everything I can, El. I will....

Her emotions surge; she clings to him--joy in her eyes.

OVER MACHINE PLANS - HEADLINES ZOOM AT US:

WORLD MACHINE CONSORTIUM FORGED AT U.N.

THE EARTH UNITES TO BUILD "MACHINDA"

INT. ARGUS - DAY (HEADLINES CONT'D)

V.J., Willie, Frank and the Argus team celebrate like we just landed on the moon. Drumlin remains unerred with his skeptic's eye. He checks his zipper--it's up.

INT. JOSS'S RETREAT - DAY (HEADLINES CONT'D)

PALMER JOSS reads alone at his mountain retreat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The book of "Machine" plans rests open on his lap. PUSH IN ON: Magazines and Newspapers stacked beside him.

The TIME cover photo is Ellie, Valerian, Drumlin and V.J. posing in front of Argus. "STAR RIDERS". "Who will go to the stars?"

OVER VIEWS OF WORLD LEADERS AND GOVERNMENTS IN SESSION MORE HEADLINES RUSH AT US:

WORLDWIDE SELECTION OF THE FIVE "EARTHLINGS" BEGINS

CONSORTIUM NAMES FIVE NATIONS TO GO

GERMANY AND U.S. TO BUILD TWO MACHINES

INDUSTRIALIST SOL HADDEN HOOKS MACHINDO

SUPER OVER: EXT. THE WIDE OPEN SPACES - DAWN

Wyoming. A Helicopter lands. "HADDEN INDUSTRIES" on the tail. Sol Hadden climbs out in a bright jogging suit. He breathes the fresh air. A VIDEO CREW piles out around him.

Hadden jogs across the rough ground, holding a signpole high--like the Olympic torch. He stops, takes in the panora and plants the sign in the ground like an explorer claiming new lands. The Video Crew captures it all.

WE PUSH IN ON THE SIGN:

M A C H I N E W Y O M I N G

CUT TO: BLACK

FADE IN: EXT. SALT FLATS - NIGHT

A Space Shuttle touches down on the vast bed. No crowds. No miles of headlights line the desert for the sight. This Shuttle is stealth black. AFS Security vehicles race to meet the craft, surrounding it even before it stops.

Pod doors open. TECHNICIANS remove a 12 INCH SQUARE LEAD BOX from the bay with a robo-arm and load it into an Armored Car. AFS Security are everywhere.

EXT. WIDE OPEN SPACES - NIGHT

The armed convoy drives throught the night. A roadsign appears in headlights. Bigger. Better. Permanent, but right where Hadden planted it; "MACHINE WYOMING".

THE VIEW CLIMBS REVEALING: A sprawl of lights and buildings where nothing used to be. Electrified fence surrounds the rambling facility. Roads are still being built. Captain Nemo's Volcania. The new Los Alamos.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANT ENTRANCE - CONTINUING ACTION

The convoy pases through a Security Gate. AFS OFFICERS check I.D. and cargo.

The convoy continues toward the gleaming 'SYSTEMS INTEGRATING DOME" rising in the center of the sprawl--the cherry on top.

INT. SYSTEMS DOME - CONTINUING ACTION

Hangar doors open. The Convoy drives right in.

AFS BERETS open the armored car rear doors. TWO TECHNICIANS in helmeted space suits remove the lead box--
--and place it in a germ free vacuum cube. TWO GLOVED LEFT HANDS insert security keys in the command locks--

VOICE (O.C.)
Three...two....one...

GLOVED HANDS TURN the keys together. The box opens like a flower presenting a "Hadden Computer Chip" sealed in a transluscent vacuum cube. A SERVO-ROBO ARM enters frame picking up the cube. WE FOLLOW THE CUBE TO:

The "Hadden 12000"MEGA COMPUTER. The array is 30 feet high and 60 feet long.

PETER VALERIAN'S GLOVED HANDS enter commands at the computer. The robo arm inserts the "drive-cube" into a blinking port on the vast computer array.

VALERIAN (over P.A.)
Chip interface secure. Punch it up.

Valerian wears headgear and chin mic. He's in control. TECHNICIANS in powder-blue jump-suits are everywhere.

The HADDEN LOGO appears on the H12000 MAGNA VID. Then, Sol Hadden. Behind him is the simple logo for Machindo, stars forming the "Dodec" shape.

HADDEN (ON MONITOR)
"We are all humans". On behalf of Hadden Industries, I commend your progress. Primer page number 13,569 computations will follow. Follow them carefully. Remember you must think of yourselves as the alchemists of the twenty-first century--

DRUMLIN
Hell, it's bad enough we have to look at the guy. Do we have to take instructions from him too?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE VIEW SHIFTS TO REVEAL: The other GLOVED HANDS belong to DAVE DRUMLIN. He pitches them angrily to a TECHIE--

VALERIAN
We're not, Dave. We're taking instructions from the Vegans.

Drumlin scowls. Hadden drones on. Now computations and formulas appear on the big monitors.

DRUMLIN (CON'TD)
Where the hell is he anyway? He's never set foot in this place.

VALERIAN
I heard the same stories you did. "Retired". Offworld orbit somewhere.

HADDEN (ON MONITOR)
...Remember, We are all humans.

DRUMLIN
He's a damn Vegan if you ask me.

THE DOME - HIGH ANGLE - LOOKING DOWN

The "integration" staging area is alive with TECHNICIANS on alert status. Tower cranes rise five stories into the dome. Two olympic-sized glass covered pool vats are being scrubbed by TECHNICIANS in space-suits. Tip-tanks marked with various chemicals are being positioned over the pools by gantry cranes.

Full-size cut-away views of the machine component being constructed are projected on thirty foot high scrims.

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (P.A.)
Systems integration a go in t-minus three minutes. Clear all bays. Clear all bays--

A digital countdown ticks by on the magna-monitor. An ALARM sounds. Hardened vault doors close off the dome.

WE FOLLOW ELLIE AND V.J. passing the tanks and up the stairs to the "Command Bridge". V.J. looks terrible.

INT. COMMAND BRIDGE - POOL TANKS IN VIEW

V.J. and Ellie enter. Valerian is busy reciting data into a robo-vidcam. Drumlin glowers from the command console.

DRUMLIN
Top of the mornin', V.J. Nice to see you taking such a keen interest in all our hard work. What bar did you find him in this time, Arroway? Can't that Rusky hold his "freedom"?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He tosses blast goggles to the bleary-eyed hung-over Russian who is still half-in-the-bag.

V.J.
Your fly is open, Capitalist Pig.

Drumlin pales. His worst nightmare. He checks. It's closed. V.J. smiles triumphant. "Gotcha". Ellie tries to keep a straight face. Drumlin reddens; then he laughs slapping V.J. on the back.

DRUMLIN
I liked you better as a communist.

V.J.
So did I, Drumleen. So did I...

Ellie joins Valerian as he spiels to the robo-vidcam.

VALERIAN (to vidcam)
We don't have a clue as to how the technology works. The challenge is to follow the directions like a recipe. The results of the large quantities of formaldehyde and aqueous amonia which are about to be combined with the listed chemical agents can only be--

He falters. Ellie is looking right at him. Enamored.

VALERIAN
---What?

ELLIE
Just trying to decide if you're "totally brilliant"--or just "gifted and promising."

He flushes red. She hands him his blast goggles.

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (P.A.)
Standby. Quiet please. Computer sequencing in 5...4...3...2...

Blast Blinds close off the view from the command bridge. The Team gathers to watch on the monitors.

THE MONITORS - POOLS IN VIEW

Valves open. Gallons of Formaldehyde gush into the pools. Gaseous fumes swirl up.

IN THE DOME - THE POOLS - CONTINUING ACTION

One by one, like a Busby Berkley kick line, computer controlled tip-tanks cascade liquid amonia into the pools mixing with formaldehyde in fantastic liquid eruptions.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Along each pool, an array of large glass cylinders, like giant syringes on a suicide machine, discharge measured amounts of reactive chemical agents--computer cued. Each causing a different spontaneous reaction in the pools.

Waves form--almost tentacular--and hesitate--as if trying to find the right shape--then collapse back in the pools.

VIEWPORTS - POOLS IN VIEW

Emergency Crew in radiation "heat suits" watch the amazing chemical reactions.

ON THE COMMAND BRIDGE - CONTINUING ACTION

Audible REACTIONS of horror and wonder accompany the violent tank reactions on the monitors.

VALERIAN
(reading data)
Radiation levels normal. O2 levels tanking. Toxins! Too "hot" to breathe!

ELLIE
(incredulous)
We've got pulse beats. It's growing!

DRUMLIN
Damn thing's alive!

V.J. exalts in Russian. Drumlin hits a "panic" alarm.

ON THE MONITORS

Suddenly, a HUGE MASS RISES from the first pool, organic, pulsing, breathing, bubbling---like living tissue!!!

THE TANKS - CONTINUING ACTION

The Mass grows, differentiates, specializes, reshapes, sculpting itself--scaring hell out of Emergency Crew at their viewports.

AFS COMMANDOS enter the Dome in space suits, weapons primed prepared to repel the writhing Mass.

IT FREEZES! Having grown to the exact size and shape of the plans on the scrim behind it. Organic. Aquatic Multi-chambered. Exquisitely more complex and intricate than anything humans could fathom constructing. Then--Silence.

THE COMMAND BRIDGE - TRACK BY: Drumlin, V.J., Valerian--Ellie. No one breathes. No one makes a sound--

IN THE DOME: AFS Commandos. Transfixed. Weapons aimed. One Commando moves toward the mass--geiger counter in hand--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUDDENLY A SECOND MASS ERUPTS FROM THE OTHER POOL!

Commandos fall back--holding their fire--

THE COMMAND BRIDGE: Frightened shouts as everyboy reacts at once.

THE MONITORS: Now two IDENTICAL MASSES "squat" in the empty pools as if waiting to be told what to do.

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (P.A.)
Environment stable. Phasing sequence completed.

IN THE DOME - MINUTES LATER

Ellie, Valerian, Drumlin and V.J. circle the two masses in complete awe--then jubilation when they realize what this moment represents. Technicians begin to applaud.

Valerian embraces Ellie, swinging her around, jubilant! V.J. slaps her on the back laughing bold and free--

V.J.
"Pitno!" Hah! "The Blob"! Hey--
(to Drumlin)
"Steve McQueen", Drumleen. "The Blob".

Laughter ripples in the ranks as the knickname catches on. "The Blob!" "Twin Blobs!"

Drumlin has a grin on like a kid at Christmas. Completely overwhelmed by the sight. An epiphany for him.

At the 12000 console, Valerian calls up the "Dodec" on the big screen showing us where the "blobs" go--

BIGSCREEN DISPLAY: Blobs--above and below the five-seat crew area.

THE BLOB - CLOSER

Ellie. In a trance, inches from the surface studying every detail. The mass is composed of an intricately branched network of tiny hollow tubes--a circulatory component--like a heart. The texture appears colloidal--a pulpy red--

Ellie's hands reach slowly, drawn like a magnet, to touch it--her fingers the first human flesh to--

Drumlin grabs her hand back!

DRUMLIN
You know the instructions. Hands off this component. "Do not touch".

Ellie looks at her hands, in a euphoric daze.

WE FLASH TO:

EXT. ARROWAY HOUSE - ELLIE AT AGE THREE

Running to their mailbox by the driveway. She opens the door and peers in.

INSIDE THE BOX - A POSTCARD OF THE GRAND CANYON

Her father's printing is legible. "Dear Presh...." She reaches in, excited. A WASP is building a nest inside.

ELLIE (to wasp)
Hi!

The Wasp buzzes--as if to answer. Ellie retrieves the letter unharmed.

RESUME: THE DOME

Ellie flinches back. Drumlin softens, holding Ellie, protective. Affection and comradery he's never shown her.

DRUMLIN
Look at us. Intoxicated with a new technology from another world and losing sight of its dangers.

ELLIE
Then you concede this is proof of extra-terrestrial intelligence?

DRUMLIN
I don't "concede" anything, Arroway.

Drumlin heads over to V.J. and Valerian checking data; his old crusty self. Ellie right on his heels--

ELLIE
Can't you just say you were wrong? You know if you were my Post-Doc advisor, I'd still by trying to get a PHD!

DRUMLIN
--As a Scientist--you are flawed. But as a woman you've got more balls than any man I know.

She smiles through intense anger and stalks away. Valerian picks up on the confrontation and heads after her.

TO THE BLOBS: V.J. poses for a picture between the twin masses. He's holding a fishing rod. FLASH!

INT. TV CONTROL ROOM - UNKNOWN LOCATION - NIGHT

Hadden's wall. The world at his fingertips. Where is he this time?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WE SEE: SPORTS; The Knicks and Lakers playing each other. There are WOMEN players on both teams. NEWS: We see an instant replay of the BLOBS forming in the pools. Next to that screen, WE SEE: JOSEPH preaching in front of Babylon trying to keep Tourists from entering.

And finally, on CNN the pictures of the 4 "MACHINDO" CHOSEN CREW MEMBERS appear; V.J., the exotic DEVI SUKHAVATI from India; XI, the rugged Chinese archaeologist; EDA, the Nigerian physicist in his flowing silk robes; and a BIG "?" where the U.S. member is supposed to go. WE PUSH IN ON THE "?" as we go to:

EXT. STAR FILLED SKY - TELESCOPE POV - VEGA - NIGHT

Winking blue through the atmosphere.

MS PRESIDENT (O.C.)
Just the star? No hostile planets, no laser battle stations--Kitz?

EXT. NAVAL OBSERVATORY - OUTSIDE WASHINGTON D.C. - NIGHT

The President peers into the Naval telescope. MEDIA presses in. Kitz, Joss and Valerian pose with her; the "Selection Committee". The mood is tense. Kitz is uncomfortable.

An Aide leads them away from the Press Corps.

MS. PRESIDENT
I hope you Scientists know what you're doing. Kitz here is still convinced that the Machine will blow up the world or tip the Earth's axis, or something.

KITZ
Every military leader has to paint his adversaries as monsters. We can't think of the other side as human, or we might not be able to kill them.

JOSS
Since when did being human stop the senseless taking of human life?

The President acknowledges Joss with private delight.

EXT. OBSERVATORY - CONTINUING ACTION

The President's group strolls along a lit breezeway. Secret Service shadow their progress. Ms. President sifts through photos of the International and U.S. Candidates.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED

VALERIAN
The consensus is, if we build the machine correctly, it will carry five passengers to Vega.

MS. PRESIDENT
The other four countries have made their choices. The former USSR has chosen V.J. Lunacharsky for the first seat. He's their best phyicist.

INSERT: PHOTOGRAPHS; She plops the picture in Kitz's hand.

KITZ
He's a weapons expert. We should send a military equal.

The President holds a Chinese man's photo. Rugged. Older.

MS. PRESIDENT (continuing)
This is a peaceful mission, Kitz. The Chinese are sending Xi. Their best archaeologist--One woman, Devi Sukhavati, the physicist going from India--The Nigerian Physicist--Eda--his country's national hero--

Kitz finds their pictures for the President.

JOSS
And what about Eleanor Arroway?

Joss stops her on Ellie's picture. True to form, he pressed everyone's button. Valerian locks eyes with Joss. The President regards them in silence.

INT. DOBBS HOUSE HOTEL - D.C. - NIGHT

TIGHT ON TV: The same photos of the selected Crew Members. The U.S. a big "?". V.J. is being interviewed. No sound. Just picture.

Ellie is doing everything she can to avoid watching the phone or the TV.

ELLIE
C'mon, Peter. Where are you?

She picks up the phone, hangs up. Paces, dances, puts a pillow over her head. She tries to read a book. Ellie's picture and Drumilin's appear on TV flanking the "?".

RESUME: INT. OBSERVATORY LIBRARY - SAME TIME

As the President leads the group in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MS. PRESIDENT
We're picking somebody for the Olympics and we don't even know what the events are.

She tosses the stack of pictures on a chair--frustrated.

MS. PRESIDENT (knowing)
Peter, I know Arroway's a brilliant scientist. You...like her, I know. And she's obviously impressed Palmer--I'm impressed too. All the men she has to compete with--she probably wishes she'd never even heard from the stars.

KITZ
She's a loose cannon. She leaked the message all over the world without so much as nod to the D.O.D and the N.S.C. Did you see her interview?

Kitz clicks on a big screen TV and VCR. A video of candidate interviews plays. He fast forwards--

VALERIAN
The Committee had been asking her questions for almost eight hours. She gets annoyed at dumb questions. Drumlin's the same way.

ON TV

Ellie is being interviewed in a sterile office. Lines around her mouth, bags under her eyes. She looks tired--and "annoyed at dumb questions".

ELLIE (TV)
What do I think of 'the world population crisis'? You think this is the key question I'm going to be asked on Vega, and you want to make sure I give the right answer?

A voice answers O.C. You can see her visibly bristle. Valerian knows what's coming. He can barely watch.

ELLIE (TV)
Okay. Right. Overpopulation is why I'm in favor of homosexuality, a celibate clergy, no foreign aid for famine victims--no capital punishment, no prison and no gun controls.

Ellie waits, deadpan, frozen, for the next question. Ms. President points. Kitz pushes "pause". Valerian can't help but laugh at Ellie's spunk. The President is grim.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRESIDENT
Diplomacy's not exactly Arroway's strong point. Let's see Drumlin.

Kitz fast forwards the tape to: Dave Drumlin wearing a blue polka-dot bow tie, looking tanned and very fit.

DRUMLIN (TV)
I don't really need testosterone to keep me going. I know there are people who think I'm too cold, too aggressive. But if you really want to understand the extra-terrestrials, you'll send me. I'm more like them than anyone else you'll find.

Ms. President turns the TV set off herself she's so completely put out.

MS. PRESIDENT
Some specimens! She's an atheist, and he thinks he's from Vega already. Why do we have to send scientists? Gandhi, that's who we should send. Jesus Christ. And don't tell me he's not available, Palmer--

Palmer laughs easing the tension--

VALERIAN
I don't think Dr. Arroway is an aetheist. She just hasn't made up her mind about God yet. She has-- high standards of evidence.

MS. PRESIDENT
What do you think, Palmer?

Joss is uneasy, trying not to appear adversarial.

JOSS
Nobody questions the strength of her commitment--but I can't pass judgement on her character. I would need to know more.

VALERIAN
It's <u>her</u> discovery, Ms. President. Ellie deserves to go.

Silence. Ms. President sits down to wrestle with her decision. Joss and Valerian lock eyes.

INT. DOBBS HOUSE - SAME TIME

Ellie clicks off the TV--a total nervous wreck.

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
What do I have to do--make a wish on a goddamn star?

She grabs her headphones and sits on the floor pulling her knees up under her chin. She closes her eyes lost in the white noise. WE SEE WHAT SHE HEARS:

FLASH TO: TIRES HUMMING ON THE ROAD

The Rabbits sit up in the headlights. A PHONE RINGS!

RESUME: HOTEL ROOM

Ellie answers the phone as if it were a 10 megaton nuke.

ELLIE
Yes--Pete---?
(disappointment)
Sure. Send it up.

IN HER HOTEL ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Ellie tips the BELLMAN for a small envelope. She stiffens as she reads it, then she's piqued.

INSERT: NOTE [WE HEAR JOSS'S VOICE]

"Meet me at the National Science and Technology Museum for a test of faith, 8:00 PM tonight."

EXT. NATIONAL SCIENCE MUSEUM - NIGHT

Lots of People are leaving. Ellie is the loner going in.

INT. SCIENCE MUSEUM - CONTINUING ACTION

Almost empty. Machinery is stuffed into every corner of a vast entrance hall. A steam calliope from 1876 is playing a jaunty piece. Weird echoes. Ellie looks around. No Joss.

THE ROTUNDA - MINUTES LATER

The sound of her sneakers squeaking on the marble floors as she approaches the Rotunda.

To Joss--leaning over the circular railing fixed on a foucalult pendulum hanging above a curved bowl shaped floor. The basketball-sized iron "ball" hangs motionless.

ELLIE
No hello, no explanations, and no please? So--the committee sent you? Am I on the bus--or off the bus?

JOSS (en garde)
Arroway--you have no faith.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
Scientists don't need faith, remember? We rely on hard evidence and the laws of nature.

He points to the pendulum. Motionless.

JOSS
The pendulum stopped swinging about seven p.m. How do you suppose that happened?

ELLIE
Don't tell me you stopped it with the power of prayer?

JOSS
That would be an abuse of faith.

ELLIE
Ask God. Piece of cake for him. And if I remember--you talk to him regularly--right?

He gracefully hurdles the brass rail. The tiled slope falls away ten feet to the pendulum.

ELLIE
What're you doing?

JOSS
A test of faith. Yours.

Ellie, determined to win, hops over the rail with him. She half walks--half slides down the tile slope. He catches her, breathless beside the large pendulum ball. Ellie finds herself laughing--drawn to his magnetic charm.

JOSS
There's a scientific law that says the pendulum when swung, cannot increase its arc with each swing but can only decrease. Mmmm?

He swings the heavy iron pendulum ball in a gentle arc.

ELLIE
You know your stuff, Rev. First and second laws of thermodynamics.

JOSS
(mischievous)
I was hoping you'd say that.

He puts his arms around the ball and wrestles the pendulum climbing back up the slope to the guardrail. Ellie helps him, the puzzled look on her face turning to worry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They poise on the edge of the slope. Joss holds the pendulum ball at its maximum arc--two inches from his face.

JOSS
So, according to this "law", if I let go the pendulum, when it swings back, it should stop--before it knocks my teeth out.

Ellie nods warily.

JOSS (continuing)
Good. If you "believe" this law of gravity; if you have "faith", then you won't flinch or duck when the pendulum swings back at you--
--will you?

--offering her the ball. Ellie blanches. She walked right into this one. Ellie raps the black bob. Solid iron.

ELLIE
You're diabolical.

JOSS
Never tested your faith?

ELLIE
Faith's got nothing to do with it. Gravity does. I'll test my belief --if you test it with me.

Joss smiles. She turned the tables on him again! Who is this woman who keeps rocking his perfect little Ark!?

JOSS
You have no idea how you test me, Ellie Arroway.

They stand side by side on the edge of the circular wall. Joss positions the iron bob one inch from their chins.

JOSS
Don't push it. Increases the arc. And don't lean forward even a hair. Do you have a good dental plan?

ELLIE
(adrenalin rushing)
Let's just do it, okay. And no praying--

JOSS
That would be cheating.

Both hold their breath. Joss nods. Both let go the ball.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE PENDULUM BALL - ARCING

Falling away from them. We follow the pendulum arcing down the slope and up--up--the other side forty feet away.

Ellie and Joss. Mesmerised. Fixed on the ball. Time and motion slow down.

The ball slows and comes to a dead stop. Reversing its trajectory, the pendulum falls back toward Ellie and Joss. We swing with it--suddenly moving much faster than either expected--careening toward them.

Ellie gasps, clenching her fists. Joss is transcendent, unflinching. The BALL GROWS alarmingly in size as it closes. Now it's enormous!!

Ellie yells and ducks away! THE PENDULUM BALL STOPS right where the laws of gravity and nature command it to--

ONE INCH FROM JOSS'S FACE!! He doesn't flinch! Then it falls away--

Ellie teeters and slides down the slope to the floor. She pouts like the girl she once was. Vulnerable. Beautiful.

Joss joins her. He extends his hand to help her up.

ELLIE
I chickened out! Can't believe it.

JOSS
But you do believe, Ellie. You believe in science...with just a tiny speck of doubt.

Ellie looks up at him. His warm reassuring smile. His hand extended in respect and admiration. She takes it---

ELLIE
That's not doubt. That's a hundred years of knowledge fighting a million years of instinct. Again--double or nothing.

SECURITY GUARD (O.C.)
Hey! What're you doing down there? Are you folks crazy?

The SECURITY GUARD circles the guardrail.

ELLIE
Completely!

Ellie and Joss dodge the swinging pendulum like kids on a playground.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSS
It's all right, officer. We're just testing our faith.

SECURITY GUARD
(insulted)
You can't do that here. This is the Smithsonian--not a church.

That did it. They both square off at the Guard. Lookout.

ELLIE
(Joan of Arc)
Yes we can. It must be permitted --by the first amendment--

JOSS
(damn the torpedoes)
--Or the first commandment.

Joss makes Ellie laugh like she hasn't in a long time. The Guard just looks at them. They are crazy.

EXT. REFLECTING POOL - THE MALL - NIGHT

In the distance, a tent and cardboard shanty city of Homeless is visible around the Washington Monument.

SURVEILLANCE POV - TRACKING ELLIE AND JOSS

The night is clear. Ellie and Joss walk along the reflecting pool--their voices electronically amplified. WE HEAR: their voices Phasing until they're intelligible. Someone is listening.

ELLIE
Mom sent me to bible class after my Dad died for "religious guidance." In the middle of the first one-- the Preacher's wife called my poor Mother irate saying, "You come get this young lady immediately." I was the only twelve year old ever banned from Sunday School.

Joss laughs warm and full.

JOSS
Do I want to know why?

ELLIE
I ask too many questions.

JOSS
You know I wish I'd known you when we were kids--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
(almost coy)
Why...Palmer?

JOSS
(almost embarassed)
You ask too many questions.

She laughs again. More comfortable than she's been with a Man in years. She slides her arm in his as they walk.

SURVEILLANCE VOICE (V.O.)
Are you clear? What's the delay?

ANOTHER SURVEILLANCE POV - ELLIE & JOSS

A TELESCOPIC SITE raises into view. Cross-hairs focus on Ellie. Joss steps in the line of fire blocking the target.

SHOOTER (V.O.)
I haven't got a window. Shit--

JOSS
We were poor dirt farmers. I joined a carnival when I was, oh, twelve, thirteen. I read everything I could get my hands on. Science, the Classics-- One day something happened...We were setting up the rides in a storm. A lightning bolt struck me dead. I was clinically dead.

ELLIE
--And you met God--"face to face."

JOSS
(tentative nod)
You haven't seen what I've seen.

Ellie wants to believe him. There is no doubt about his depth of commitment. They walk in silence.

ELLIE
You're not worried about God's existence, Palmer. But do you really believe God created the Universe just for us?

She points to the cold flickering blue-white star in the nightsky. (is that possible with lights from D.C.?)

ELLIE (continuing)
Look how big the universe is. We're one puny planet only a few thousand years old--according to the bible. I hear your religious leaders and I think to myself "<u>Your God is too small</u>"--!

CONTINUED:

She gestures to the stars. CROSS-HAIRS FOCUS on Ellie.

ELLIE
We both want the same thing, Palmer. I want to see the Creator's signature without having to accept it on faith--

Joss stops walking, overwhelmed by the feelings he has. He faces Ellie--trying to find the words.

JOSS
You want proof there is a God? Ellie--how do you feel right now? This moment? Are we just billions of cells wiggling in place? Is that all we are? Where in Science can a child learn what love is?

Ellie's emotions sneak up on her. She wells up--

JOSS
You're afraid to believe in God--

ELLIE
(passionate conviction)
No--I'm not. I'm afraid of lying--to myself. It's got to be real, Palmer. It's got to be true.....

Joss daubs her eyes gently--protective.

ELLIE
Sorry, Palmer. I used to have talks like this with my father.....

SHOOTER (V.O.)
I'm clear--

A HOMELESS MAN sitting on a bench across the Pool from Ellie and Joss speaks quietly into his FM mic.

HOMELESS MAN (V.O.)
Do it--now--

TELESCOPIC SITE - POV

Crosshairs center in Ellie's forehead. Abruptly, she ducks away--A BEEPER SQUEALS. She digs for her pager.

ELLIE
That's probably Pete--

She hesitates, fixing on the Homeless Man staring at her from the bench across the pool. He's familiar.

The Man stands abruptly and hurries away. A POLICEMAN rides toward him on horseback, patroling the mall.

CONTINUED:

TELESCOPIC SITE - POV

Ellie gets the creeps. Joss, sensing her fears, takes her arm and hurries her away--and out of the line of fire.

HOMELESS MAN (V.O.)
Abort it. Clear out---

EXT. SIDESTREET - NIGHT

The Homeless Man reaches an unmarked van and hops in the back. His DRIVER starts the motor. He keeps the van door open searching for his "Shooter".

SHOOTER races after the van as it pulls away. He pulls a scoped rifle from under his shabby rain coat and tosses it to Archangel. Now we see the Homeless Man--it's JOSEPH!

As the van roars into the night, WE SEE: BUMPER STICKERS: "GOD DOESN'T NEED RADIO TELESCOPES" and "JESUS SAVES" THE VIEW GLIDES UP TO: The Starry starry night.

ELLIE (V.O.)
...It was a star--the Evening Star, floating down from the sky and--entering Geppetto's window--

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BETHESDA HOSPITAL - DAY

Ellie's Mother. In a coma. A respirator breathing for her with rythmic grating rasps. This is torment for Ellie. She reads outloud...hoping to make contact.....PINOCCHIO.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
The Blue Fairie bent over the old woodcarver and spoke to him so softly so as not to disturb his slumber...."Good Geppetto", she said, "you have given so much happiness to others--you deserve to have your wish come true"....

Ellie breaks down--everything crashes in on her.

ELLIE (continuing)
C'mon, Mom--make a wish. Talk to me.

She busies herself brushing her mother's hair.

ELLIE (continuing)
Okay--I'll make one for us. I wish--
(she closes her eyes)
I wish it was summer time. At the lake. It's just you and me and Daddy...I can see him, Mom...You can too...Just wish.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellie sobs, quietly and gently. She kisses her Mother--then she just has to get out of there. The door closes behind her. From somewhere deep in Mom's comatose sleep--

MOTHER
El....lie.....

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Ellie exits in tears. She doesn't seem to know which way to turn or which way to go. She freezes at the sight of--

JOSS--waiting. She almost comes apart. He comforts her.

ELLIE
What--did I break the golden rule or something?

He lingers, not quite knowing what to say.

JOSS
Sorry about your Mother. I'll pray for her--

Ellie is not impressed. Joss can't get a handle on her.

JOSS (continuing)
I haven't been able to stop thinking about you since the day we met. You've raised questions I should have answers for. Even last night--- Ellie, you've made a great discovery; like fire, or writing, or agriculture. They're building your machine--

He's not telling her something. She senses it.

ELLIE
But what? They sent you didn't they? The committee--

JOSS
No--I asked to come. The President made her decision, Ellie. Drumlin's got the seat. They're concerned you might not...cooperate with who or what's out there.

Ellie. Reeling. Betrayed. Manipulated. Used. Devastated.

ELLIE
I'll ask too many questions, huh? I failed your part of the test?

JOSS
Ellie--wait--please--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She makes a full circle around the revolving doors right back in Joss's face.

ELLIE
I was right. Your God is too small!

She's gone. Joss is more confused than he's ever been in his mortal life.

INT. HOSPITAL ELEVATOR - ASCENDING - DAY

Ellie. In tears. A WOMAN in a wheelchair stares at her.

FLASH TO: ELLIE AGE 10

Running to her father and leaping into his arms--crying

JAKE
What's up, Presh?

ELLIE
They didn't choose me--they didn't choose me.

CUT TO: BLACK

FADE IN: TIGHT ON: A PAIR OF TASSLE-PASTIES; twirling like a centrifuge, propelled by two jiggling breasts. Tina Turner's rendition of "PROUD MARY" plays on the bad p.a.

INTERCUT: BOMBUILDERS

Rubber gloved hands stuff the plastique explosive links into a 20 foot long cobalt blue dowel. A remote detonator is squeezed in and sealed.

INT. ROADHOUSE BAR - EARLY MORNING "PROUD MARY" CONT'D

The TRUCKSTOP STRIPPER dances right in V.J.'s face. He drinks Vodka straight from the bottle; silly bemused smile; brand new gaudy cowboy boots propped on the stage.

V.J.
Lu blu, Zhetzina, Lu blu--

Another pair of boots prop beside his. It's Ellie. She slaps a newpaper down. Front page pictures of "The Crew of Machinda". V.J. and Drumlin are featured prominently.

ELLIE
Congratulations, V.J. You're going. Who'd you bribe? Was it sexual favors?

V.J.
Were it was up to me, Ellie, we would both be going---wherever the "Droshky" is going.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
"One of the guys." That's me--

She pours a drink eyeing the sweaty stripper. She chugs.

ELLIE
Hey--this is some way to celebrate. What're you doing here?

V.J. shoves another ten bucks in the Stripper's G-string.

V.J.
The Folies Bergere inspired me to design a multiple warhead satellite. So--I feel it my professional duty as a physicist to visit Paris often.

The Stripper grinds a "Peterbilt" ad on the wall.

ELLIE
I hate to give you the bad news--but the Folies closed years ago--and this is not Paris.

V.J. gapes, stunned by the news. He slowly stands his huge drunken frame up and surveys the seedy Roadhouse.

V.J.
Merde--I've been misinformed.

Ellie staggers him out. He blows kisses to his stripper. The Stripper dances mindless; her G-string a U.S. flag.

EXT. MACHINE WYOMING PLANT ENTRANCE - EARLY MORNING

AFS Berets scour the two gleaming Hazardous Materials Transports at the Security Gate.

An AFS OFFICER goes over the manifest. The Driver waits patiently in the truck cab.

OFFICER
Twenty seven Erbium dowels--Any idea what they're for on the damn thing?

The officer checks the Driver's security ID. Familiar man with a beard. THE VIEW SHIFTS TO REVEAL: JOSEPH is the Driver. We recognize him behind the new beard.

JOSEPH/DRIVER
Lord knows.

The Officer grims and waves the convoy through. Joseph drives the Erbium dowels and his bomb to the Dome!

CUT TO:

EXT. MACHINE WYOMING - DAY

Ellie's T-Bird passes the road sign heading for the sprawl. V.J. is distant. Not his usual one man party.

V.J.
(major drunken spiel)
Listen to me, Ellie. The Earth is a ghetto. All human beings are trapped here. That is why we kill each other. We can't get out. And now along comes this invitation. Fancy. Elegant. All from a big sparkling city beyond the ghetto we are too poor to travel to.

He points to the sky futilely.

V.J. (continuing)
So they send a machine to take five of us to the Sparkling city. And what do you think will happen when we get there? A Royal welcome? No. We will be put on display. And mocked and laughed at. Maybe we should stay in the ghetto.

Silence. Ellie looks at him again. The road hums.

EXT. PLANT ENTRANCE - DAY

Ellie & V.J. pass Security in the T-Bird. The gleaming Hazardous transports pull away on the other side.

WITH JOSEPH'S TRANSPORT - TRAVELING

He hits the highway, a free man.

INSIDE THE CAB: Joseph sets the digital timer on his remote detonator. HANK WILLIAMS plays on the radio.

INT. MACHINE PLANT ROOM RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Drumlin and his WIFE glad hand REPORTERS for a Press Conference announcing his selection.

DRUMLIN
Once the Erbium dowels are installed--the Machine is ready to be activated--

V.J. and Ellie enter. He points out someone to her. There, waving from a group of Reporters is Valerian, his youngest DAUGHTER on his shoulders. His TEENAGE DAUGHTER and JAN, his wife, waving at her.

V.J. braces Ellie up. She's torn between joy and heartbreak. She smiles and waves back.

CONTINUED:

Valerian to set his little girl down--

JAMIE
No Daddy--up--up--

VALERIAN
Jamie-Eleanor, you can't stay up there all day. Say hello to "aunt" Ellie--

Ellie reacts to hearing her name attached to this beautiful child. Valerian sets her down.

The "Two Ellie's" size each other up. Big Ellie kneels extending her arms.

ELLIE
Well look at you, Jamie-Eleanor--

Little Ellie runs and jumps in Big Ellie's arms. Ellie lifts her into the air the way her father did her. Little Ellie giggles with complete delight. Big Ellie exalts.

Ellie and Jan. Face to face. All the years they've shared Peter in different ways--in different worlds. The things that could have been. The things that are. Jan embraces her. Ellie is genuine in her hug back. Both tear up.

JAN
Oh, Ellie. I'm so sorry it wasn't you. Peter is heartbroken.

ELLIE
I'm okay, Jan. Drumlin deserves to go--the old dinosaur.

As they embrace again--Drumlin booms to the Press Corp.

DRUMLIN
If anybody here's smarter than I am --don't sit down and don't shut up.

Everyone laughs--Drumlin eats it up. He thrives on it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SYSTEMS INTEGRATION DOME - DAY

Our first full view of the "DODEC"; ninety-percent completed. The twelve-sided architecture is emerging. The Blobs are in place inside the the first spherical shell.

Circumferential tracks rise at various heights around the Machine; all crowded with TECHNICIANS, GOVT. OFFICIALS and REPS of the World Machine Consortium.

KITZ and MILITARY BRASS survey from the Command Bridge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ON THE BIG SCREEN: Hadden repeats his recorded spiel.

HADDEN (VIDEO)
...You are the alchemists of the twenty-first century--

DRUMLIN & VALERIAN hold the lift for Ellie and V.J.

DRUMLIN
Can somebody shut that guy up?
(waving to Ellie)
Arroway--move your tailfeathers.

THEY ASCEND beside the Three-story cranes, now fitted with robo-arms. Each carefully lifts the COBALT BLUE EBRIUM DOWELS from liquid oxygen environments and positions them over the organic matrix where the Blobs have been placed in the machine.

DRUMLIN
These rods have to be the power supply. Some kind of booster.

V.J.
There's no "John" on the machine. So it had better be a short trip.

ELLIE
Maybe it doesn't go anywhere. Or it makes a quick rendezvous with a "mother ship" in orbit.

WE FOLLOW A DOWEL; identical in color and shape to the one the bomb-builders filled with plastique. Robo arms slide the dowel into the matrix.

IN THE ELEVATOR - DOWELS IN VIEW

Valerian stares at the ceiling with his eyes closed.

DRUMLIN
Pete--why do you always have to look up when you think? It's absolutely assinine--

VALERIAN
It helps me block out your noise.

Drumlin cracks a grin squeezing Valerian around the shoulder--an uncommon display of affection. The elevator stops. Drumlin leads them on the catwalk circling the dowel placement to the com-bridge.

ELLIE
Hey, Drumlin--if you chicken out, I still want to go.

CONTINUED:

Drumlin turns on the walkway and scowls at her, his back to the operation. Then he grins--and checks his zipper---

It happens. A LOW VIBRATING THUD--like a dud firecracker. A FLASH OF LIGHT! THE SHOCK WAVE OF THE EXPLOSION!

Everything is flying! All time slows. Drumlin is in the air too--careening toward Ellie--his arms outstretched--a desperate look on his face--he slams Ellie to the deck--

--Just as a TWO-TON STANCHION CRASHES through the walkway right where she stood--plumetting into the dome below--

ANOTHER DOWEL EXPLODES!

It's gantry crane crashes down pulling people and catwalks with it smashing into the machine below--An eruption of electrical explosions and searing sparks billow up---

VALERIAN is dashed against the Command Bridge--

V.J. grabs a two inch steel cable catching himself as the catwalk plummets into the void. He hangs there, swaying over the nightmare tangle of metal and human bodies below.

ELLIE sees only Drumlin--his face against hers. Sickened smile on his lips. Blood streams from his nose. His eyes roll back. Ellie grabs his head--the back of his skull is torn open. Her hands are covered in Drumlin's blood!

ELLIE
NOOOOoooooOOOOOOO!

FLASH TO:

THE BOMB EXPLODES AGAIN! DRUMLIN FLIES TOWARD HER!

THE BOMB EXPLODES AGAIN! DRUMLIN FLIES TOWARD HER

END ACT II

CUT TO: BLACK

ACT III - THE GALAXY

FADE IN: HADDEN'S TV WALL - LOCATION UNKNOWN

MONITOR: CNN COVERAGE OF DRUMLIN'S FUNERAL

Against a Montana backdrop, the President hands the American flag from Drumlin's coffin to his Widow.

V.J. tends Valerian in a wheelchair. Jan beside him. Peter looks dead in his eyes. His ambition and energy gone. Joss prays silently over the grave.

Ellie is nowhere to be seen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MS. PRESIDENT (TV)
No terrorist group, however well organized, will deflect humanity from this historic goal. Dave Drumlin, and those who died in the machine disaster, have not died in vain.

MONITOR: A GUN BATTLE AT A MOTEL

FBI SHARPSHOOTERS and POLICE fire mercilessly from all sides into a rundown motel. Bodies lay in view. A MAN AND WOMAN are gunned down trying to escape on motorcycles.

SUPER: SALINA, UTAH

ANCHOR PERSON (V.O.)
--the week long standoff between FBI, Police and members of the "Millenium" Terrorist group ended in a bloody shootout. The group claiming responsibilty for the "Machine Disaster" in Wyoming that killed fourteen and injured more all died in the battle. The Cult leader, who calls himself "Joseph", videotaped his own graphic epitaph--

AMATEUR VIDEO of JOSEPH appears. He's spookily calm--

JOSEPH (VIDEO)
You see our world must be wiped clean to make way for our Lord's coming in the Millenium. The Apocalypse...is now---

Joseph sticks a 9MM in his mouth and pulls the trigger.

WIDEN TO SEVERAL MONITORS:

We see BABLYON in flames. Firetrucks and FIRE FIGHTERS everywhere as the vast theme park burns out of control. A FEMALE ANCHOR PERSON is "live" -- too close to the fire.

ANCHOR PERSON (TV)
The fire started with a mysterious explosion, oh, nine hours ago now-- If Firefighters can't control it--

The Anchor spots JOSEPH FOLLOWERS leading a "pray in". Anti-Hadden signs abound.

ANCHOR PERSON (TV CONT'D)
Excuse me--what do you say to allegations that your dead leader, Joseph--caused this fire--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FOLLOWER (TV)
We say God heard our prayers--
This fire is the hand of God
ridding the world of an immoral
blight--Sol Hadden. He sells us
perversion--he built the machine
of the devil--now he's paying for
his sins--GOD BE PRAISED!

FOLLOWERS begin singing 'ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS'

ANCHOR PERSON (TV)
(wrapping up)
And what about Sol Hadden, the
reclusive controversial billionaire?
He remains silent and his where-
abouts--unknown. Live from Babylon--

AS THE ANCHORPERSON SPEAKS WE WIDEN:

Revealing Hadden's silhouette seated at his electronic wall. Behind him is a breathtaking view of planet Earth from 100 miles out in space. Sol Hadden is in orbit!

EXT. VIEW OF EARTH - 100 MILES UP

The STS INTREPID; a space shuttle/supersonic jetliner spaceplane, breaks through the clouds heading into orbit. HADDEN-VIRGIN-SPACEWAYS visible along the sleek fuselage.

WE SEE: Hubble. The "Mir" Freedom Space station. Two other SPACE STATIONS orbit into view. Custom jobs. Private habitats in space!?

INTREPID POV - PRIVATE SPACE HABITATS - CLOSER

We close on the largest--identical to Hadden's model we saw at Bablyon--"The Methuselah" space station. Slowly spinning so the long panorama port always faces Earth.

SUPER: METHUSELAH STATION

INT. METHUSELAH DOCKING BAY - SPACE

The STS nestles with a clank against the Millenium. floods the chamber. The lock door opens.

ELLIE APPEARS in the hatchway. Pale, gaunt, Drumlin's death etched in her face forever. She glidewalks, using the hand rings and holds along the chamber, trying to stabilize in the zero gravs. Her duffel floats behind her on a leash.

Sol Hadden bobs into view--like an apple in a washtub. He's wearing a red oriental "Gi", velcro soul sneakers for traction and those amazing sunglasses. His ears seem bigger in space.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HADDEN
Welcome to Chateau Methuselah--

Ellie is about to barf. He guides her bobbing together.

HADDEN (continuing)
It'll pass. The good news is you never have to worry about cosmetic surgery in zero gravs. Nothing sags in space. Ever.

Now he gets that patented lopsided smile from Ellie.

INT. STATEROOM/STUDY - LATER

Luxurious, but compact. Hadden has perfected the one-room concept of living. Even the ceiling is utilitarian in zero gravs. Instead of Babylon, a magnificent panorama of Earth fills the view outside.

Ellie drifts in front of the long window like a fish in an aquarium. She is tranfixed by the beauty of "home".

HADDEN (continuing)
You get to thinking of Earth as an organism, a living thing. I find myself worrying about it. Wishing it well--

He nurses a diet cola through a straw.

ELLIE
(revelation)
There's no borders. No nations. Up here it's just---one world.

HADDEN
Think of the poor fools running it that will never see it from your point of view.

Silence. The sun begins to set. A stunning transition. They watch Earthnight together. Signs of humanity humming and blinking lights. Hadden points out the sights.

HADDEN
The Boston--New York sprawl.

That's the glowing swath of light in Eastern North America. A tropical storm brews in the Carribean. Bright orange glows dot the West.

HADDEN (continuing)
Hawaii. The Volcanoes are restless.

Ellie points to a vast intense glow in the Pacific.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
(enchanted)
Looks like---Oz.

HADDEN
Japanese squid fleet, actually.
But--from now on--it's "Oz".

Ellie traces the magical glow with her finger on the window.

FLASH TO:

Drumlin. Flying through the air. The explosion...

Her Father--"falling up".

RESUME: ELLIE

She sags against the window. Quiet tears. Hadden reaches to comfort her. He stops short--never touching her.

HADDEN
I'm really sorry about Drumlin.
He was a tough old pisser.

ELLIE
(steeling herself)
He was...Valerian may never walk again. All those people. I try not to think about it....The machine--it's totaled--

HADDEN
You know my insurance company actually believes I sabotaged it so I could recoup my money.
I guess I torched Babylon too.

ELLIE
(spitting it out)
We have to build another machine and we need you to finance it--so--

HADDEN
Ellie--we don't have time.

ELLIE
(frustrated, sardonic)
For what? Is the world going to end like that Joseph guy said?

He glides to his ceiling mounted console and punches up a skyview of Earth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HADDEN
I mean--whoever runs the Universe sent us humans the machine because they're worried about us as a species.

ELLIE
You think the gods finally took pity on us and sent the machine?

HADDEN
Wouldn't you if you saw Hitler on TV? "Why only yesterday those quaint Earthers were chasing antelope and defacing cave walls."

He beckons. She pushes off floating to him on the ceiling. She checks the skyview. They're over Japan. He enlarges a big island to the north.

HADDEN
Hokkaido, Island.

ELLIE
That's where you manufactured and tested the machine components--

HADDEN
--To make sure you were building the damn thing right. We backed up and assembled every element--

He enlarges again to a familiar sight--a systems integration dome just like Wyoming. Ellie is incredulous.

ELLIE
Sol--I don't believe you. You've been building and testing an identical machine all along?

HADDEN
Actually--we're ahead of you. When it's ready--if the Consortium and the Crew is willing--it's yours.

ELLIE
(whoops like schoolgirl)
Is this legal? Have you ever had a zero-grav-kiss?

She glides to him kissing him clumsily on the cheek. They bonk heads. He blushes like a schoolboy.

HADDEN
There is one condition---

He punches a command. Below--a floor hatch opens.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A pod-like sleep vessel rises--an interstellar cocoon. The transparent lid opens revealing satin sheets and life support.

HADDEN (continuing)
--you have to have sex with me.
In the name of science of course.
(embarassed)
Just--kidding. The machine's yours.

Ellie busts out laughing as they rapel down to the cocoon.

ELLIE
You are the devil. What's this?

HADDEN
My next adventure. Immortality.

He shows her the features. Virtual reality sex, stereo, I.V. nutrients supply. Sol climbs in.

HADDEN (continuing)
No-gravity adds twenty or thirty years to your lifespan. Low oxygen even more. With cryonics freeze I can push it even more.

ELLIE
(alarmed)
It looks like a coffin---

HADDEN
Very perceptive. Would you rather be buried six feet under--burned to ashes--or shot into space toward a distant star? Your favorite planet. Imagine finding peace in orbit around Saturn. Floating in space. You and the cosmos.

He closes his eyes and folds his hands across him in deathly repose.

EXT. MESTHUSELAH - EARTH DAY

As the sun comes up, an aging Space Shuttle docks.

INT. DOCKING BAY - CONTINUING ACTION

Hadden glidewalks Ellie to the airlock. There is a closure in this moment as they share one last look at the magnificent view of Earth.

ELLIE
Come back--with me. Come home.

HADDEN
I can never go back to Earth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HADDEN (CONT'D)
Doctor's orders. You see my heart has adapted to no gravs. It would just stop beating in Earth's gravity. The good news is--my lymphoma is in complete remission.

Ellie looks at him startled--completely shocked.

HADDEN
Low oxygen plus zero gravity equals no cancer. Gravity kills. Don't worry. The IRS can't get me here--yet. I have enemies everywhere but space--

They linger. A SHUTTLE CREWMAN raps on the airlock door. Ellie extends her hand. Sol Hadden takes it gently--and kisses it, just like Errol Flynn.

She steps into the airlock. They face each other. Hadden hesitates before closing it.

HADDEN
This is my one and only piece of advice. Immortals are very careful. They have to be. I don't know what the Vegans will look like or what they want from us, but if you ever get to see them--don't forget what I'm telling you Eleanor Arroway--Something humans think is dead-cinch safe, the Vegans will consider an unacceptable risk. Be yourself.

He hits the button. The airlock door shuts between them.

ELLI'S POV FROM THE SHUTTLE - MINUTES LATER

The umbilicals release. The Shuttle drifts away. Hadden waves from the panorama window. Methuselah recedes as the shuttle retros back down to earth.

FADE SLOWLY OUT:

FADE IN: EXT. - THE SEA OF JAPAN - AERIAL POV DAY

We rush like the message down through the clouds to Hokkaido Island, descending past the snow covered peaks of Saporro to:

EXT. OBIHIRO VILLAGE - HOKKAIDO ISLAND - DAY

The Machine! Sitting in the village square! But its shimmering surfaces are made of ice. JAPANESE ARTISANS chip and grind with blurring precision the finishing touches to a full-size ice sculpture of the "Dodec."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUPER: HOKKAIDA IS., JAPAN - NEW YEAR'S EVE - 2000

In the f.g.: TWO KENDO WARRIORS wearing the quilted armor of medieval Japan pause for a heartbeat brandishing their wooden staffs then pummel and parry each other.

JAPANESE VILLAGERS gather to watch. The promenades are decorated with banners for the Winter Festival. STREET VENDORS are everywhere. It's an unusually warm day--almost springlike. MUSIC is everywhere.

Ellie and DEVI SUKHAVATI, the Biologist from India, walk arm-in-arm taking in the sights. Devi is striking. In her forties, but ageless. Huge black eyes, erect figure and a magnificent Sari--splashing color. Random VILLAGERS wish them well in Japanese. "Machindo" is spoken here. MACHINDO SECURITY GUARDS shadow their every move.

Devi runs her finger across the Ice Dodec.

DEVI
So--Ellie, here we are. Two women get to go. How come you are not married with lots of children?

She stares at the sky, offguard. Tougher than she thought.

ELLIE
The Men I loved were either snatched away from me--or chose someone else. So--I don't fall in love anymore. That way I don't miss it and nobody gets hurt.

Devi sees pain and wisdom behind Ellie's lopsided smile.

DEVI
I met my husband at medical school in England. Ghosh was a harijan--an untouchable--My father threatened to disown me if we married. We were too much in love. I made my choice. Ghosh. He died a year later. A bacterial sepsis. He was treating starving children at a relief hospital--- I never remarried--

Ellie squeezes Devi's hand who returns the gesture giving each other bonding loving strength.

ELLIE
Maybe we'll meet some nice single Vegans.

They disentegrate in girlish laughter.

CUT TO:

INT. HOKKAIDO SYSTEMS DOME - NIGHT

There is it is. The first full view of the finished Dodec. Silently waiting. PUSH IN SLOWLY: to a Smiley Face sticker stuck on the hatch. Graffiti simply reads "UP".

INT. CREW SLEEP QUARTERS - TRACKING - NIGHT

Devi goes over the contents of her compact medical kit for the hundreth time. She places a picture of her and Ghosh in the breast pocket of her Machindo jumpsuit.

EDA, the tall elegant Nigerian Physicist, meditates before his shrine and the picture of his Wife and young children.

XI, the Chinese Archaelolgist in his sixties, smokes cigarettes and drinks sake with V.J. listening to Alexander Nevsky full blast on a stereo.

INT. ELLIE'S SLEEP QUARTERS - NIGHT

She's on the phone. Her peanut butter lid in front her. Jake Arroway's picture all but faded over the years.

ELLIE
I know you can't hear me, Mom.
I don't know when I'll be back--
or even if I'll ever be back--

INTERCUT: INT. HOSPITAL - SAME TIME

A NURSE holds the phone up to Mom's ear. She's comatose. On a respirator. Ellie's voice is now her white noise--

ELLIE (PHONE)
I think you'd tell me to go if you were able. I have to...believe that--

RESUME: ELLIE

ELLIE (continuing)
I think you'd be proud of me--So would Dad. Mom, I love you--
I know where I came from--
(barely able to speak)
Gotta go--bye--

She hangs up, trembling, shaking apart at the seams. Someone KNOCKS. Pulling herself together, she answers.

Palmer Joss stands there! Rumpled and jetlagged. A sorry looking bouquet of airport flowers in one hand and a small present in the other.

JOSS
Ellie--happy birthday.

He's about the best thing she's ever seen in her life. Ellie absolutely melts and falls in his arms.

CUT TO: BLACK

FADE INE: INT. SYSTEMS INTEGRATION DOME - EARLY AM

Security lights bathe the Dodec in an eerie glow.

ELLIE
Nobody knows what's going to happen tomorrow when we "flip the switch".

THE VIEW SHIFTS TO: ELLIE AND JOSS sitting on the tarmac in the darkness. She's in blue Machindo fatigues, fanny pack and a small camera bag.

ELLIE (continuing)
I'm scared, Palmer--

JOSS
I know--I know. I am too--and I'm not even going.

They laugh nervously. Joss rubs her hands like they're freezing. Both have the jitters.

ELLIE
What if I don't come back?

JOSS
You will. You'll be back. I'm not moving from this spot until you do.

ELLIE
Oh, Palmer--I may never see you again.

She rests her head on his shoulder. She's trembling.

JOSS
Have faith--

ELLIE

Faith? Have you forgotten who you're talking to?

JOSS
When I say "faith", Ellie, I mean love.

Joss folds his small present into Ellie's hands. She opens the box and holds up a golden circle medallion hanging on a chain. It's inscribed. She can't read it in the dark.

JOSS (quoting)
"The Arroway commandment. The first and second law of thermodynamics equals faith."

Ellie grins lopsided. She swings the medallion like the pendulum in the museum. This time she doesn't flinch when it swings back at her. She <u>does</u> have faith.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
I have something for you. I was going to take it with me--

She opens her fanny-pack and digs out her Peanut-butter lid. She offers it to Joss with both hands. Trembling. Joss examines the icon. He sees the picture inside--

JOSS
(knowing)
Your father---Ellie, I can't--

Ellie closes her hands around his and the lid, empowering him the way her father empowered her.

ELLIE
You keep it. It's a part of me I want you to have....

Ellie and Joss. Kneeling before each other in darkness. Neither has ever been so in love as at this moment.

Dome lights suddenly flash on showering the Dodec with light. TECHNICIANS flood in from several entrances.

TWO MACHINDO SECURITY rush over to them. She pulls out her security necklace. No problem.

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (P.A.)
Activation Machinda T minus O-seven hundred and counting--

Ellie and Joss look at each other--frozen. They embrace It's too soon. Please just a little longer.

SHARP CUT TO:

INT. SYSTEMS DOME - ACTIVATION DAY

TIGHT ON BIGSCREEN TV

Ms. President speaks for the world--

MS. PRESIDENT (TV)
This is not a briefing, and not a farewell. Each of you makes this journey for the entire human species, past, present and future. You are heroes of our planet. Speak for all of us. Be wise... and come back...

AS SHE SPEAKS WE SEE:

MACHINE PERSONEL fill in the staging area. The Five Crew listen intently--all dressed in the blue jumpsuits loaded with insignia, nation flags, adverts and shoulder bags.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Last stop is a bank of phones for phone calls. Eda is on one, translating the President's speech to his family in Nigeria.

THE BIGSCREEN - EDA APPEARS

In a pre-recorded interview. He's surrounded by JAPANESE CHILDREN. Ornately embroidered robes flow off his towering frame. High stiff cap--

EDA (TV)
I wish all children could be this healthy. If children do not have enough to eat, then education and science are a luxury they cannot afford. I am taking this journey for my children and the children of the world--

AT THE STAGING AREA

Two Attendants escort Devi and Eda to the "Decon" Chamber, where an irradiation light shower which kills earthly bacteria on the Crew before entering the Dodec.

Devi passes through the decon chamber and enters the ribbed umbilical tunnel leading to the machine hatch. Eda follows with a big wave.

Ellie watches go them then scans the glass enclosed Command Bridge high up in the Dome. She twirls a palm frond nervously.

THE GLASS ENCLOSED COMMAND BRIDGE: No Press are visible anywhere. Some familiar faces though. Joss waves to Ellie below. Never taking his eyes off her.

THE BIG SCREEN - XI APPEARS

In his pre-recorded interview. The wrinkles on his face make him seem older, but his physique fit and youthful. His native tunic is buttoned at the collar--obligatory for Chinese dignitaries.

XI (TV)
You see, I spent my life digging up China's ancient past--to find the wisdom of our Emperors. Wisdom is central to the well being of the world. Now perhaps I go to Vega to dig up more wisdom. Even immortality. Our Emperor Qin, who built the great wall--who named China--was obsessed with immor-tality. I take this trip for him.

Ellie doesn't see the real Xi beside her as she watches.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He offers Ellie "hachimaki"; a cloth headbands with a map of Earth printed around it.

XI
"Hachimaki." Japanese tradiion
to prepare you for physical,
mental and spiritual strength
when going into the unknown.

He helps Ellie Devi put it on. Then he steps back, cups his hands and bows.

ELLIE
Xi Quiamou, I am honored.

All the Technicians are wearing the bands. Xi bows to them --to the Bridge. Then enters the chamber.

V.J. lights another Lucky Strike smoking as fast as he can as his Attendants herd him to the decon chamber.

V.J.
Wait--I would like my phone call--

He grabs a phone--as he fishes for a pack of smokes--his Attendant finds them. He's frisked head to toe producing five more packs. The last in his crotch.

ELLIE
C'mon, V.J. It's a little late to
be calling one of your girlfriends.

V.J.
Actually, I was calling my
grandaughter. It's been so long.
I realize I do not really have
anyone to call.

He stares at the phone sadly. Forlorn. V.J. heads into the chamber cursing in ten languages.

Ellie is last, palm frond in hand, anticipation high. At the chamber, her Attendant directs her to a monitor.

MONITOR:

Joss is there grinning like a Cheshire Cat.

JOSS (TV)
The Palm frond is a nice touch.
A fitting offering. I'll be right
here....waiting for you, Ellie.

She starts to speak when Valerian rolls into view beside Joss. Ellie wells up--touching his face on the screen.

ELLIE
Pete! You're here!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VALERIAN (TV)
I couldn't miss you jumping off another cliff, El. Don't laugh when I do this--
(he gives her thumbs up)
Go punch a hole in the Cosmos. See you after class--

Ellie is overwhelmed. She looks up to the Command Bridge. She can't quite see them--but she knows they're there.

IN THE DECON CHAMBER

Ellie steps in. Irradiating Light passes over her. WE FOLLOW HER into the long umbilical to the small hatch. She takes a breath, closes her eyes and climbs in.

ON THE COMMAND BRIDGE

Monitors and data banks spew readouts. Valerian is at the command console. Joss is at the window fixed on the Dodec.

FEMALE COMPUTER VOICE (P.A.)
Activating Benzels minus 9-8--

THE COUNTDOWN CONTINUES OVER:

INSERT TV - CNN COVERAGE

Blizter on location at Hokkaido. The Dome is visible in the distance.

BLITZER (TV)
We remind you, no press coverage is allowed of the event--but we have just received word the "activation" countdown has begun--

QUICK CUTS: ON THE COUNTDOWN

ARGUS - SAME TIME

Frank, Willie, Fisher and the team watch CNN. In the b.g., the "message" is still sending. Prime numbers scroll.

MOM'S HOSPITAL - SAME TIME

Nurses and Patients watch with Mom--still comatose. Her lifeless eyes reflect the TV. "7-6-"

INT. CAMP DAVID - SAME TIME

Ms. President, other World Leaders, Kitz, et. al. watch the same coverage. The machine is not shown. Blackout.

INT. METHUSELAH - SAME TIME

Hadden's wall shows the same coverage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hadden's "skyviews" are directly over Hokkaido. Where is Hadden? The VIEW SHIFTS REVEALING: Hadden's pod descending into the floor. "5-4"

INT. MACHINE - CONTINUING ACTION

Looking down at the Five in their chairs. Heads to the center, feet facing out. Ellie leans back into the molded and cushioned plastic. "--3--2"

ELLIE
We should have insisted on a nice chintz for slipcovers. Give this place a little color.

Devi leads the nervous laughter. Tensions released.

The first of three spherical shells "benzels", one inside the other, encircling the cabin, begins to slowly spin. Intricate patterns have been cut in the shell. Mesmeric.

V.J.
The instructions said nothing about wearing clothing. We should all be naked--!

More nervous laughter. A building HARMONIC HUMMMM joins the second benzel as it begins to rotate around them in the opposite direction.

Ellie reaches and takes Devi's hand. She to Eda. Eda grasps Xi--to V.J. who completes the circle with Ellie.

EXT. DOME - CONTINUING ACTION

Powerful light sources on the Dodec suddenly illuminate. The outer Benzel begins to spin. The Machine is a blur.

ON THE COMMAND BRIDGE

TECHNICIAN
Benzels reaching critical RPM.

Valerian reaches out and takes Joss's hand.

INT. MACHINE - LOOKING DOWN - MAXIMUM RPM

Xi shows fierce determination; V.J. a deliberate calm; Devi's eyes are open wide; Eda reveals only an attitude of quiet attentiveness. Ellie squeezes Devi's hand.

ELLIE
Off to see the Wizard.
(then with profound regret)
I wish...I'd had a child.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CREW POV - LOOKING UP

Suddenly the spherical Benzels flicker--go transparent--The Dome, the Command Bridge, everything is visible for a millisecond--then instead of blasting off--it's as if the Earth opens up and swallows them.

INT. COMMAND BRIDGE - SAME MOMENT

Monitors whiteout in a blaze of blinding light.

INT. ARGUS - SAME MOMENT

The Message from Vega suddenly stops. Prime numbers gone.

Willie and Fisher run checks. Frank is dumbfounded. THE VIEW RUSHES IN ON: BLANK EMPTY DARK MONITORS!

SHARP CUT TO:

INT. DARK TUNNEL - LIMBO

The Dodec plunges down a strange tunnel just wide enough for it to pass. The dodec's walls have become transparent giving the uneasy feeling the Five are riding unprotected in their chairs.

Ellie has the forward view. V.J. the rear.

V.J.
We're falling--underground?!

The walls of the tunnel appear organic. Pulpy as they race by. Like a worm's innards or an instesinal wall.

XI
I have dug many tunnels. I don't think so--

The forward vortex of the Dodec scrapes the wall. Flakes of glowing particles fly off--sucking in behind the Dodec.

The machine banks sharp to the right--accelerates through a quick series of bobs and weaves--then slows to a crawl.

EDA
We've lost momentum.

DEVI
There's no oxygen supply on board. If we stay here too long--

Mild panic sets in.

V.J.
Maybe we built it wrong, Ellie. Maybe the Vegans forgot we need to breathe--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
Everybody just calm down--

She looks up. Above her, the "blob" organosilicate collapses on itself in places and unfolds in others. The ebrium rods vibrate--She stands up to get a better look--

Xi shouts pointing behind them.

They watch in fear and awe as the tunnel walls contract toward them like peristalsis--undulating, squeezing the Dodec forward propelled by the collapsing walls--

AHEAD--a dim point of light grows intensely. A blue-white radiance floods the inside of the Dodec. The end of the tunnel gets bigger as they race toward it.

ELLIE
A black hole--we're in a black hole!

V.J.
If we are then the gravity mass would stretch us like taffy--like--like pasta--! We would be very dead!

DEVI
Maybe we are--!

THEY ERUPT FROM THE TUNNEL----INTO SPACE!

EXT. DODEC IN SPACE - CONTINUING ACTION

The Five hug their chairs taking in the magnificent 360 degree view of space. No human has ever had such a view. Above, below, around--they are on a magic carpet ride. The five exalt, cry out, regale--

Before them is a huge blue-white sun, incredibly close.

ELLIE
(instantly)
Vega! It's VEGA!

The Blue star she wished on as a child seems close enough to touch. Emotions surge. She grabs her compact imaging system and focuses on Vega.

DEVI
(mind blown)
How are we breathing?

ELLIE
(to Eda)
Do you understand what's going on?

Eda is figuring excitedly on his hand computer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDA
Yes. I can almost prove this can't be happening!

A COMET PASSES BELOW--V.J. picks up his feet even though it's thousands of miles away. He points behind them.

A DARK VELVET BLACK HOLE, blacker than space, recedes. The glowing particles of the tunnel walls still flickering.

V.J.
If it is a black hole then we cannot return. Bye bye, Hokkaido.

XI
(to Ellie)
Do you see any planets?

ELLIE'S POV - THROUGH VIDEO IMAGER

The Vega system. Two huge sunspots are visible on the sun. A great ring of debris surround the star. Several comets are visible. Their tails blowing back to Vega.

ELLIE
No--none. Just debris--
(half to herself)
Frank was right. Vega's too young to support life.

The Five look at each other anxiously--

XI
Then there are no Vegans.

DEVI
Where did the message come from then? Who sent it?

Xi sits quietly staring up through the transparent pentagonal panels through the blobs in silence.

A GREAT MASS PASSING ABOVE blocks Vega's light eclipsing the Dodec into shadows. All heads look up.

ABOVE THE DODEC - THE IMMENSE IRREGULAR POLYHEDRON

Drifts by--encrusted with millions of bowl-shaped transmitters like barnacles aiming all over the universe. The massive device which sent the message. It's easily 100 miles across.

ELLIE
They're talking to the whole universe--unbelievable.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Five watch in stunned silence. Devi cranks photos with a motor drive. Ellie snaps to shooting her video-imager.

V.J.
Where's the welcoming delegation?

XI
It could be a robot device. A sentinel of sorts. To patrol the borders. Like the watch towers on the Great Wall--

Suddenly, the Dodec falls again, like stalling out on a roller coaster and plunging down the "steeps".

AHEAD--A black hole hangs in front of Vega. They rush toward it. Ellie checks her watch.

ELLIE
That's it? They take us to Vega and show-off their black holes? Give us a peek at their radio telescopes? Expensive ride!

Eda makes a calming gesture to Ellie.

EDA
Wait and see. It is not the same tunnel.

EXT. VEGA SYSTEM - CONTINUING ACTION

With a rush of triumphant MUSIC the Dodec disappears into the dark hole hanging in front of Vega.

EXT. SPACE - ANOTHER VIEW - CONTINUING ACTION

<u>As the Dodec "pops out"</u> of another tunnel arcing across "The Horsehead Nebula" eerily glowing red. Two suns touch--The giant red star pours into the smaller yellow dwarf. The point of contact bursts with brilliant light.

ON THE DODEC

The Five no longer speak. Words fail them. They are on the galactic roller coaster. And their hosts are showing off.

The Dodec plunges into another hole.

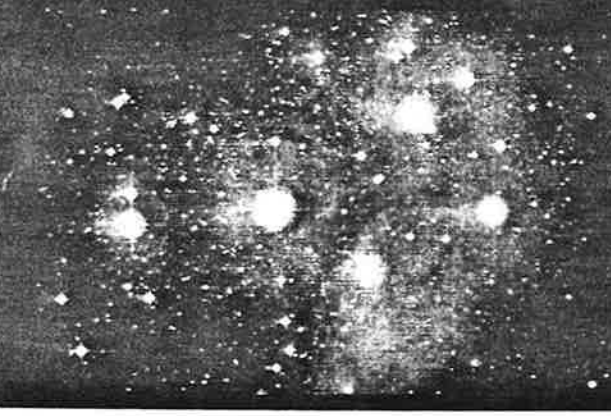
THE GALACTIC SYMPHONY ACCOMPANIES THE DODEC AS IT ERUPTS IN CRESCENDO FROM FOUR CONSECUTIVE TUNNELS:

Each view of the galaxy more powerful than the previous. The faces of our Five "Stariders" reflect the overwhelming wonders flashing before them.

A SERIES OF CUTS TO:

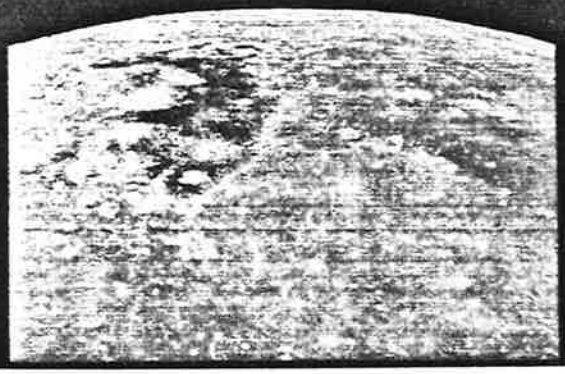
HORSEHEAD NEBULA & IC 434

VELA SUPERNOVA REMNANT

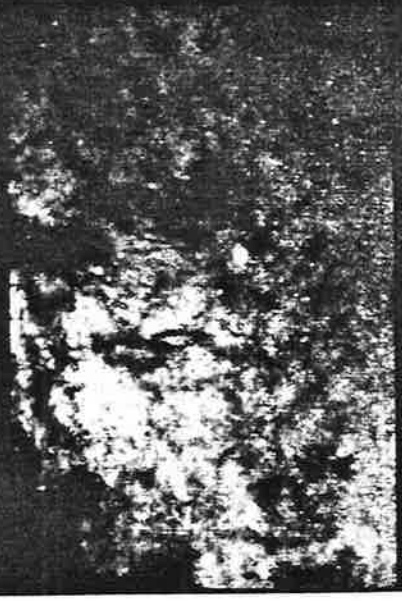


PLEIADES STAR CLUSTER

CARINA NEBULA



PLANET OF A NEARBY SOLAR SYSTEM



STAR CLOUDS OF SAGITTARIUS

WE SEE: THE DODEC POP FROM A HOLE TO:

1) A SUPERNOVA; tidal waves of gas clouds rush away as the Star blows itself up! Shock waves tumble debris at us. At the center of the cataclysm, a rapidly rotating neutron star flashes like a lighthouse---ten times a second.

The Dodec dives into another tunnel just ahead of the shock waves and debris emanating from the blast.

2) TO A QUADRUPLE STAR SYSTEM; One pair of stars, red and white, orbiting each other while a pair of yellow dwarf stars orbit them as the dwarfs revolve as well.

3)TO A BLOOD RED GIANT STAR as it engulfs an Earthlike planet. We watch the planet's oceans boil away. It's surface chars and sears dead. No life.

4)TO THE LAST TUNNEL; torturous twists and turns into a long straightaway. The Dodec zooms out the mouth and into:

EXT. THE CENTER OF THE GALAXY - CONTINUING ACTION

A STARFIELD of so many multi-colored starlights so close together, they almost touch. Millions more stars than are visible from Earth on a clear night.

WE FOLLOW THE DODEC; the Five, exhausted by their journey, are energized by the sight. The sky is blazing with suns.

TO THE LEFT, an immense, spiraling cloud of dust, millions of miles long, swirls into a BLACK HOLE of staggering proportions. So black, it hurts to look at it. Flashes of radiation leap from the center--tendrils--lightning on a clear Earth night.

THE FIVE; completely awed. Ellie pounds her feet on the invisible floor, ecstatic. A kid at the circus.

ELLIE
I don't know how, but we're at the center of our galaxy! The heart of the Milky Way!

DEVI
We left Hokkaido less than an hour ago. How is it possible?

EDA
(figuring on computer)
By subway. This is their Metro. We stopped at their stations. It's a series of static wormholes linked together--

V.J.
Einstein-Rosen bridges. They exist!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Shock and exclamations around. Eda digs an apple from his shoulder bag.

EDA (continuing)
Yes, like a worm eats through an apple instead of crawling around it. The worm hole eats through space. They're supported someway so they can not collapse--

XI
Then the tunnels were put here on purpose???

Devi gasps grabbing Ellie's shoulder. The Dodec suddenly ROTATES RIGHT. Swimming into their field of view...

THEIR POV - GALACTIC GRAND CENTRAL STATION

It fills half the sky. A vast artificial construction. On its surface are hundreds of illuminated doorways, each a different shape. Some are circular or elliptical or with odd appendages. Some are only a few feet in size; others are miles across! Every one of them, the template for some interstellar machine--

ELLIE
(realizing it first)
Docking ports! Those are docking ports for all kinds of "machindo".

The Five. Their reactions. Boggled at the sight and the possibilites for life in the cosmos. Eda exalts as they pass over a HUGE MACHINE gliding into an imposing port.

Xi cups his hands and bows. Devi gets giddy laughing like a schoolgirl intoxicated with the sight.

V.J.
Grand Central Station! For the Galaxy!

V.J. brings on wonderous laughter. He stands and applauds! The Five join hands as they witness this overwhelming evidence of the plentitude of life in our Universe.

XI
At last we've been invited--to join the galactic community. There is hope for <u>Us</u> after all.

OUTSIDE THE DODEC - GRAND CENTRAL IN VIEW

They approach a yellow-lit port, the exact template of the Dodec. Ellie watches a nearby docking port.

CUT TO:

HER POV - ANOTHER MACHINDA

The size of the dodecahedron and shaped something like a starfish is gently insinuating itself onto its port.

Ellie looks left and right, up and down, at the almost imperceptible curvature of this great station with hundreds of ships and ports. This vision of a populated Galaxy, of a universe spilling over with life and intelligence, brings a flood of emotions to her.

The Dodec gently slides into the one reserved for Earth. Ellie pulls her knees up to her chin.

ELLIE
(whispering)
"OZ"....

THE HATCH OPENS

Startling everyone. A warm yellow glow floods in. The Five look at each other. "Who wants to go first?" Eda is up and gone with a big grin. Ellie grabs her video imager to follow. She returns to her seat looking for something.

Devi goes through the hatch, humming. Xi exits. Then V.J.

V.J.
Ah--I hope one of the Little Green Men smokes--

Ellie finds her palm frond under her cushion.

ELLIE
Hey--wait for me!

INT. DOCKING PORT - CONTINUING ACTION

Ellie crawls out the hatch. The yellow light is blinding. Then she sees them....Eda, Devi, Xi and V.J.--lying side by side--LIFELESS! Before Ellie can cryout--a wave of darkness falls over her. She sinks from view!

CUT TO: BLACK

FROM THE BLACKNESS - WAVES OF IMAGES FLOOD OVER US

Ellie's birth. The bright lights. Old radio tubes lighting up. Her father tossing her in the air. Then a large Ant sits reading her Pinnochio. Ten year old Ellie as a little girl watching the stars. A Dodec flies by. The walls are transparent. She can see people inside wearing Sarongs and dhotis, reading newspapers and conversing casually.

Suddenly the stars rush at Ellie. She's "falling up". She digs her hands into the Earth to hold on---but her fingers dig in to sand, wet sand--She can't hold on!!

CUT TO:

ELLIE - FACE DOWN

Her fingers digging into wet sand. A wave rushes up covering her face. She wakes coughing and sputtering. Where is she? She can't move. She stares into the beady face of a sandcrab!? WHATTT?!!!

She sits disoriented on the verge of vertigo.

EXT. SUNNY BEACH - WIDER

Waves lap around Ellie. Palm trees. Brilliant blue water--almost too blue. Cumulus clouds in the sky. A yellow sun. One sun. Eda cavorts with Devi in the water now both wearing their native sari and robes. Xi wades in the surf, looking for shells.

V.J. is sunning himself next to Ellie, knitting a hat with palm fronds. At the moment he is trying to light a tightly rolled joint made from seaweed.

The Dodec is visible behind him--parked on the sand.

V.J.
Good morning Milky Wayyyy--

Ellie flops back down.

ELLIE
I thought I was dreaming.

V.J.
Two trillion dollars and thirty-thousand light years to walk on a beach? We could've gone to a Hawaii a lot cheaper.

ELLIE.
Our hosts must've assumed from watching our television that we'd be most happy on a sunny beach. It's a good duplication.

He holds up her bagged palm frond with one from the beach. Close but not a perfect match.

V.J.
Or a cage in their zoo. Or--we've been swallowed by a great whale.

V.J. takes a drag on the seaweed. He convulses in a coughing fit. Ellie sits up completely panicked.

ELLIE
V.J.--

Ellie runs to the spot where the Dodec was. It's gone! Xi hurries over. Then Eda and Devi.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Standing upright on the sand is a door! A plain wooden surrealistic door floating in the middle of the landscape.

When Ellie circles behind the door--it's gone. When she returns--it's still there.

V.J.
Reminiscent of that French surrealist--

ELLIE
Rene Magritte. He was Belgian.

XI
Another invitation.

No hesitation. Xi goes to open the door. Ellie stops him. Her staunch skepticism firmly intact.

ELLIE
Xi--wait. I'd like a few answers such as how we got here? Where we are?--And why? Wouldn't you?

XI
If we are to be tested, perhaps the answers are on the other side of this door.

They all seem eager to go. Except Ellie. Xi opens the door. Nothing but beach on the other side. He pulls out a small bag of rice--his offering--and steps in.

Ellie and V.J. peer behind the door. Nothing. He's gone. Eda dons his tall hat--

EDA
There is an ancient saying--"to communicate with ants, one has to become the ant." We've come here to communicate.

Ellie kisses him on both cheeks. Eda steps in--His long legs first, his robe trails until it finally disappears.

ELLIE
(stumping)
Why do we have to jump through every hoop they hold out for us? What if we don't do what they ask? Huh? Maybe going through that door is really an unacceptable risk.

V.J.
Ellie--you're so--"Ellie". For me it's like the old days. Authorities tell me what to do--I do it. Especially when I have no choice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Then the big Russian lifts her in a bear hug and disappears into the door. His jovial laugh cuts off as he disappears. Ellie can't move, transfixed.

DEVI
How do you feel?

It's not a philosophical question. Devi checks the color of Ellie's eyes and takes her pulse.

ELLIE
Little headache. I could use some black coffee and the morning paper.

Devi is satisfied Ellie is just fine. The Women embrace.

DEVI
Remember everything, Ellie. For the next time....we meet.

Then Devi is gone. The door closes behind her. Silence. Ellie reaches for it. Second thoughts. She pulls away. She surveys the beach. Ellie is alone--again.

A TIDAL POOL - LATER

Ellie brushes her teeth talking to her reflection.

ELLIE
Way to go, Arroway. We are the ants. If this is a test--I'm blowing the human's grade point average. I'm not cooperating. See. Asking too many questions instead of just doing what's expected. It was a mistake to send me. Peter should be here. Or Hadden. Or Drumlin.....No, Palmer....He'd know what to do.

THE BEACH - LATE AFTERNOON

Ellie sits with her knees under her chin, twirling her palm frond. She checks the door with apprehension. It's lower boundary is now underwater. The tide is coming in.

She stands to move to higher ground when she sees it.

HER POV - THE BEACH

A figure a few hundred meters away is walking toward her.

ELLIE
V.J.....?

No. Whoever it is isn't wearing a Machine Project jump suit. It's someone younger, more vigorous.

CONTINUED:

Standing up, she shields her eyes from the Sun. Just for a moment, it seems...it can't be.

Ellie races toward him along the water's edge. He looks as he did in the picture in her peanut butter lid; vigorous, happy. She flies into his arms--

JAKE
Hello, Presh.

His voice is right. He's perfect. The prime of his life. Waves of anguish pour out. She weeps. Hugging him with all her might. He holds her patiently, stroking her hair.

ELLIE
I've dreamed that one day you'd show up and tell me it was all a big mistake--you weren't--
(she can't say "dead")
--you were really fine.

JAKE
Well, here I am--How do I look?

Jake, his hands raised, makes a half turn so she can be sure that the back of him is there as well. Ellie wipes her eyes, laughing and crying in the same emotion--

ELLIE
Perfect. Exactly as I remember you.

He tousles her hair. She jerks away, knowing he's not real. Freaked by this apparition.

ELLIE
How did you know to do that? What are you--Robot? Holoform?

She checks his eyes--his neck for clues.

JAKE
(with deep affection)
When you didn't show up with your friends--I came looking for you
--to calm your fears.

She takes his hand feeling his wrist pulse. It's there.

ELLIE
(realizing)
Dreams. Last night I dreamed. You were inside my head. All our heads.

JAKE
We only made copies. There's a lot there; instincts, madness, music--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAKE (CONT'D)
Humans are good at dreaming. Although you wouldn't know it from watching your television.

Ellie warms to him on that one. They stroll down the beach toward the door and her few possessions, her arm around his waist.

JAKE (continuing)
--and Lovingkindness. We admire that quality. Your species is an interesting mix.

ELLIE
So--how are we doing?--I mean-

JAKE
I know--It took you many years after receiving the message to get here.

ELLIE
Do you grade on speed or accuracy?

Jake shakes "no".

JAKE
It's isn't like that, Ellie. This is not the sixth grade. We're amazed you've done as well as you have. Frankly we're surprised you haven't blown yourselves to bits by now. Aggressive civilizations destroy themselves--almost always. It's their nature. They can't help it. You humans have made great strides lately not to destroy your kind--at least in the <u>short term</u>.

He infects the phrase "short term" with foreboding.

ELLIE
(spooked)
How....short?

JAKE
We're not the interstellar Police gunning down outlaw civilizations. Think of us more as the office of Galactic census. We collect information from civilizations all over the galaxy. We let the species work out their own destinies.

Ellie grapples to make sense of this boggling mindwalk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAKE (continuing)
The Hitler pictures weren't exactly promising. We could tell you were in deep trouble. But the music told us something else. The "Beethoven" told us there was hope.

ELLIE
Is that why you made contact? To tell us you have hope for us? That's not good enough, "Dad" I need evidence--proof for my kind of what I've seen. Answers--

Ellie parades the beach.

ELLIE (continuing)
Are you behind all this? Who's in charge? What about the Crews in those other Machines at the docking thing--Can I meet some of them? Exchange views, take a few pictures?

JAKE
(stern but loving)
Ellie---

ELLIE
That's the tone you used when I didn't want to go to bed.

They reach the door. The tide has risen even further.

ELLIE
I blew it not going through the door, didn't I? There has to be more than just the beach...and--

JAKE
--A vision of your dead father? There is, Presh. Much more.

With that, he points his finger at the horizon and arcs it across panorama---UNZIPPING THE BLUE SKY!

THE SKY PEELS BACK: REVEALING THE COSMOS

They're high above the Milky Way Galaxy. Rotating spiral arms illuminated by millions of hot blue stars. In the center, a disk of glowing hydrogen rotates; the galactic core glows molten illuminated by millions of older redder stars. Rings of molecular clouds rush outward toward the edge of the galaxy.

Ellie digs her feet in the sand--hear heart pounding--

CONTINUED:

JAKE
Still afraid to "fall up", Presh?

-extending his hand. Ellie looks into his loving eyes.

ELLIE
Not anymore.

She folds her hand into his. Father and Daughter gaze up at the Cosmos. The same look of awe and wonder in their faces--(just like searching for Sputnik in 1957)

THEIR POV - THE COSMOS

Suddenly descending toward them at impossible speed. They're "falling up" toward the galactic core!

ELLIE AND JAKE: Hand in hand. She's hyperventilating. Her feet still on the beach--but she's flying as the Cosmos engulfs them.

JAKE
You are here. Earth is there.

He points at the center. A white line appears networking Lyra to a tiny dot in the galaxy. Earth.

Ellie exalts, pure untethered energy in her joy. White lines appear all over the galaxy networking the stars.

JAKE
The transit system was constructed to link the galaxy together. So as civilizations emerge and develop they can be invited to join the galactic community.

ELLIE
It looks like the Paris Metro! You built the wormholes? All of this?

JAKE
No, Ellie, we didn't build it--
We found it.

ELLIE
(incredulous)
Found it?!! You just lost me!

JAKE
The first of us discovered the transit stations when we developed interstellar flight. The tunnels were created long before us by some greater intelligence. We just learned how to use it and keep it running.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
(reeling, staggered)
"We"? Your ancestors--your species?

JAKE
Not just my kind, but civilizations from many other worlds. We don't look much like each other--

ELLIE
(boggled)
Don't show me okay--I'm not quite ready for that---

Jake unzips the Cosmos again. The "metro map" disappears. Suddenly they're "falling up" into the Orion Nebula. Interstellar gas and dust is collapsing into a dark hole.

JAKE
The Galaxy is expanding and we have to tend it along it's frontiers. Don't think of the Galaxy as wilder-ness--but more being cultivated, like a garden---

Suddenly, they're inside a "Stellar Nursery". Ellie witnesses the creation, the birth of a star. Many stars.

THEIR POV - THE STELLAR NURSERY

Gas clouds and matter collapse into an irregular rotating blob. From this womb, new stars emerge. Perfect glowing balls of light. When one is ready, it leaves the nest igniting in a stunning flash of surging blue light.

One, two, three, four, five--new stars. Tufts of nebulous gas and dust still surround the newborns trailing like umbilicals back to their nursery as the "Sibling" stars head their separate ways into the galaxy.

Jake explains this profoundly moving event as it happens.

JAKE
Stars are born in this creation of all creation--nurtured in their own stellar nursery. The young leave their nest and go their separate ways into the Galaxy--

Ellie watches the siblings part in different directions. She quakes with emotions and tears at this beautiful act.

Jake unzips the cosmos again to:

CUT TO:

A SOLAR SYSTEM - CYGNUS A

From a huge black hole; stars and matter emerge in a gush of a celestial cornucopia. They fall toward a star similar to Earth's sun.

JAKE
For every star that is born there's the potential for planets.

Dark Planets form around the star.

JAKE (continuing)
--And for many planets there is the potential for life.

He unzips the sky to:

A PRIMORDIAL PLANET

Primordial lifeforms appear...

JAKE
Many evolve intelligent life like your Earth. And advanced civilizations.

THE VIEW CHANGES TO THE PLANET AS SEEN FROM HIGH ORBIT

The planet is now a world of glass cities and glistening technology evidenced by the glow of lights on the surface.

JAKE
Aggressive ones do themselves in.

The surface is suddenly dotted with cataclysmic explosions. Fires burn out rainforests. Great oil fires cover the atmosphere with smoke and pollution.

Ellie turns away. Too close to home.

JAKE
Others are destroyed by natural catastrophes.

Ellie watches an Earthlike planet at night. Lights of its cities glowing. A LARGE COMET hurtles through space and collides into it. An enormous glob-girdling cloud of dust engulfs the world darkening it to nothing.

Jake braces her up, holding her close.

JAKE
Ellie--We have many civilizations who are happy to stay home and just dream their dreams.

ELLIE
And the others-----?

CONTINUED:

Jake turns her to the Cosmos and with a triumphant sweep of his arm--The GALACTIC GRAND CENTRAL STATION descends filling their view--

JAKE
(filled with pride)
They get to the stars on their own and take their rightful place in our galactic community.

ELLIE AND JAKE are suddenly standing on the Beach. The Sky is blue again. Ellie catches herself falling--weak in the knees. She squats on the sand, catching her breath.

ELLIE
It's so....beautiful. Our galaxy teeming with life. "Awesome" is an Earth word that's...inadequate. But none of you built it....or designed it.

She looks up at her father. He confirms shaking "no".

ELLIE
Then...you're not---

JAKE
--the "Creator". No, Presh, I'm not God as you were taught about. None of us are Gods.

ELLIE
What happened to the Subway builders?

JAKE
(shrugs)
Maybe someday they'll come back. We're just the Caretakers. The Galaxy works off and conforms to the laws of nature. We just live by them.

ELLIE
And I just want to know---Who made the laws? You raised me to ask questions. You taught me that there's no dumb questions, so why can't you with all your tricks and technology and higher intelligence answer me this one?

Jake scrapes his toe in the sand, hands in his pockets.

JAKE
You want to see the Artist's signature--the Creator's thumbprint. Well, take a look right there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jake has drawn a circle on the beach with his toe.

JAKE
Remember? "It must be Pi if it makes you cry." 3.14159--infinity.

Ellie is visibly miffed. She feels patronized.

ELLIE
There's nothing in Pi, Dad. It's not a message. The digits go on forever. Our computers have run Pi to a billion places and it's just random numbers--

JAKE
You haven't gone deep enough. The architect's message is there.

Ellie traces the circle with her finger almost believing. She scrambles to her feet, questioning, seeking.

ELLIE
How can you hide a message in Pi? It's like gravity. It's built into the fabric of the universe.

JAKE
Exactly.

Ellie and Jake--he's willing her to comprehend.

ELLIE
(bursting)
Well--what does it say--tell me--

He pauses for a moment--to speak--The mysterious OPENS!

A SMALL CROWD OF PEOPLE pours out of it--all in a jovial mood, as if this were a long-delayed picnic outing.

Eda accompanies a stunning YOUNG WOMAN in a brightly colored blouse and skirt, her hair neatly covered with lacy gele favored by Moslem women in Yorubaland.

EDA
Hepa, Ellie. May I present my wife, Fema--Ellie, Arroway.

Fema embraces Ellie like a long lost sister.

Devi Sukhavati holds hands with an earnest YOUNG MAN, his eyes large and soulful.

DEVI
Ellie, please meet Surindar Ghosh, my late husband.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Surindar and Devi embrace Ellie together. She's overwhelmed.

ELLIE
Where did you go when you stepped through the doorway?

DEVI
London, 1973. The day I met Surindar. Where did you go?

Ellie shakes with joy--words fail her. Devi folds their hands together, laughing, crying together. Ellie looks to Jake as if to say "thank you."

He gestures with open arms, that patrician tilt of his hand and that lopsided grin.

Xi is in animated discourse with a small VIGOROUS MAN who has drooping wispy mustaches and is garbed in a richly brocaded and beaded gown.

ELLIE
And you must be Emperor Qin, builder of the Great Wall of China--

Ellie bows low. Xi speaks excitedly to Qin who brightens toward Ellie at Xi's explanation.

V.J. ushers over a GIRL of eleven or twelve, her blonde braids bobbing as she walked.

V.J.
This is my granddaughter, Nina. ...more or less. My Grand Duchess. I should have introduced you before. I have not been a very good father or grandfather...

Nina embraces Ellie with a warm hug. V.J. sheepishly embraces Ellie. Soulful. Comrades. Ellie whispers--

ELLIE
I'm proud of you, V.J. You could've shown up with the Folies Bergere'.

V.J. roars laughter. Ellie takes her father by the hand.

ELLIE
(proud, loving)
Everybody--since our hosts have given to each of us.....our deepest loves--<u>this is my father</u>, <u>Jake Arroway</u>--

For a moment, the apparition of Jake appears to well up. The group gathers to greet him. Devi raises her camera.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVI
Okay--everbody--smile--

HER POV - THRU VIEWFINDER

The group photo of the millenium. Devi cranks a few. One by one, smiles fade on "the Five".

Devi senses it. She turns around. The magic door is gone. The Machine is there. Tide lapping against it. The hatch opens with a harmonic rush of air.

THE VIEW RUSHES IN ON ELLIE AND JAKE

JAKE
Time to go, Presh.

Ellie. Wrenching. Torn apart. She's ten years old again.

ELLIE
Just a little longer--

The other "hosts" shepherd the rest of the Crew toward the machine.

JAKE
Sorry, Presh--

ELLIE
There are others of us--our political leaders--religious leaders--who should--witness what we've seen here--

JAKE
That's not the way it works. None of you will be able to return. The machine is not reusable. You have all the evidence you need.

Ellie steels herself, but she can't hold it in.

ELLIE
But...why, "Daddy"--why?

JAKE
Oh, you can come back--It's an open invitation--When you can come as one world--one species--united. Then that time will come when you develop the technology to get here on your own.

She turns to the Dodec. Only V.J. remains, on his knees to Nina. The other hosts are anxious. Waves lap higher.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He hands Ellie her shoulder bag. She checks it quickly--video imager, tapes--

JAKE (continuing)
You've seen a galaxy full of life waiting for Earth to join us... The decision is yours. You're grown up now. You're on your own.

Waves splash against their feet. She looks down. The circle Jake drew in the sand is almost gone.

ELLIE
What's it say, Dad--the message.

JAKE
It's been sitting there for billions of years, since the beginning--waiting. If anyone can find out--it's you, Presh.

She flies into his arms, never wanting to let go.

ELLIE
I...love...you...Daddy...

JAKE
Bye, Presh. Give your mother my love.

Daddy's little girl.. The Center of the Galaxy. Waves wash the last of the circle into....white foam.

CUT TO: WHITE

INT. DOME - COMMAND BRIDGE - DAY

Monitors whiteout in a blaze of blinding light!

THE STAGING AREA - CONTINUING ACTION

Shouts! Alarms! Spacesuited Technicians rush in spraying fire extinguishers. Clouds of CO2 engulf the Dodec.

The fog clears revealing the machine. PUSH IN ON: THE HATCH--Two Technicians open it! V.J. sticks his head out.

V.J.
(exultant)
Hah! We made it--

The others pile out, giddy with excitement, patting each other on the back, whooping it up. V.J. kisses the deck.

ELLIE
We did it! WE MADE CONTACT WITH--

It hits them all at once. Nobody seems glad to see them. Spacesuited Techies stare at them in stunned silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE (continuing)
What's wrong? Did we grow horns--

Valerian rolls into view with Joss behind the germfree glass partition. Ellie waves excitedly---She holds up her imaging system triumphant.

ELLIE
Wait'll you see what's on these!
Nothing's ever going be the same--!

She falters. Valerian and Joss are dressed exactly as they did the day of activation.

VALERIAN (P.A.)
El?--Is everyone alright? We had some kind of malfunction--

What? WHAT?!! Devi grabs Ellie pointing up to the big digital clock. The Crew look at each other in confusion.

"*ELAPSED TIME: 00:17MIN.23SECS*"

ELLIE
(checking her watch)
What day is it?

JOSS (P.A.)
It's today. Friday, January 1, 2000. Your birthday. Are you okay?

Ellie rushes to the glass separating them. She flattens her palms against his wanting to touch him.

ELLIE
What....happened?

VALERIAN
Nothing. The Benzels spun up--
reached speed--then reversed
--shut down and you got out.
The Machine never went anywhere.

The Crew reacts. Instant shock and protest. Ellie slips off her boot and dumps beach sand streaming onto the deck!

ELLIE
Wanna bet?

CUT TO:BLACK

FADE IN: HOKKAIDO SQUARE - DAY

The formidable ice sculpture of the Dodec has melted into a small featureless remnant. Melted to nothing. Attendants sweep its waters into the drain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellie passes by in a jeep accompanied by Joss. She wears a tailored suit. Looking pale. Grimset. She gazes at the melted Dodec. It's as if it never existed.

They stop at the Dome entrance. TWO AFS BERETS await her.

ELLIE
You should've been there, Palmer--
Hadden too--to see the birth of a
star--the creation. It was a
downright religious experience--

JOSS
Sounds like we're even--We've
both seen God face to face.
(she laughs warmly)
--but I'm afraid Sol's no longer
with us...His oxygen failed right
after the Machine...They're sending
a shuttle to get his remains.

Ellie faces the sky saying a silent farewell.

ELLIE
Poor Solly. He believed.

JOSS
I'm a believer too, Ellie. In you.

He means it. They embrace awkwardly but sincerely. The AFS Berets escort her into the complex.

INT. HOKKAIDO CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The COMMITTEE sits staring at us. NINE MEN and ONE WOMAN. Kitz, in full dress uniform, occupies the center seat. The conference table is filled; stacks of printouts and data sheets, equipment belonging to "The Five".

KITZ
Now, Dr. Arroway, even though I
was against the Machine project
from the start I have not per-
mitted my judgement to be clouded--

The VIEW SHIFTS TO: ELLIE seated at another table flanked by Valerian in his wheelchair. They lower their eyes on Kitz's last statement. "Bullshit".

KITZ (continuing)
After careful examination, the
committee finds no compelling
scientific evidence to corroborate
the claims and alleged events
reported by the five crew members.

Ellie is on her feet instantly.

CONTINUED:

Valerian tries to calm her. Kitz raps for order.

ELLIE
This is outrageous. You think we made this up? We went to the center of the galaxy. We did--

KITZ
--And you talked to your dead father! He's renovating the galaxy with some of his friends!

Kitz is boiling now. Some Committee Members excuse themselves. Ellie can't believe any of this. She laughs nervously.

KITZ
It's not funny, Doctor. You must think the human race is really stupid.

He holds up one exhibit after another--

KITZ (continuing)
You don't present a shred of evidence. No video record--all blanks. Conveniently erased. Film in what's her name's camera--

He holds up one labeled "group shot". Blank white frame.

KITZ (continuing)
Any artifacts of the superior civilization you claim you met? No. Mementos? No. Rocks? Pets? No. Just some sand that could be from any beach in California.

Valerian waves a report.

VALERIAN
Look at the materials assessment of the Dodec. High tensile stress. Exposed to high radiation environment. Cosmic Ray tracks---

KITZ
And what could cause such stresses?

ELLIE
A black hole!

VALERIAN
Technically an Einstein-Rosen bridge.

KITZ
And how do you prove that? Hmm? Is there one available? Let's see one.

CONTINUED:

Valerian sags in his chair.

ELLIE
But we have the "message" from Vega confirmed all over the world--and the machine. It exists.

KITZ
You spent two trillion dollars. You could fake any evidence you wanted. Argus was in trouble. You and some of your smart friends see the world's a little shaky. What better way to keep your funding alive than to "receive a message from space" that changes the world?

ELLIE
This is madness.

An Aide presents her a one page document. She reads it.

KITZ
Sign this statement agreeing to a gag order, and nothing will happen to you as long as you keep quiet. But not a peep on this extra-terrestrial nonsense. No more ETI's. Unless they can come down and confirm your story. Maybe they just don't appreciate your work--

A paper airplane collides with his bald pate. It's the document. Kitz looks up.

Ellie is halfway out the door slamming it big time. Valerian pounds the table. Yes!

INSERT: TV - THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS FROM THE OVAL OFFICE

MS. PRESIDENT (TV)
Yet much good has come of this. We've discovered we're not alone. Machindo brought us closer to global unity....Today, I award the medal of freedom to Dr. Eleanor Arroway--who risked all for the good of humankind---

EXT. CHESAPEAKE BAY - SUNSET

The cabins from Ellie's childhood, Ellie pushes her Mom in her wheelchair for some fresh air. Ellie's different. Imbued with a knowledge and truth that radiates through her entire being. They stop on the same grassy knoll where Ellie and Jake watched the stars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIE
Mom...I have something to tell you....I saw Dad. I saw him. ....He...sends you his love.

Mom, staring blankly, suddenly raises her palsied hand up and pats Ellie's resting on her wheelchair.

MOM
Tell Jake--chiffon dress. Stop cleaners...way home from store.

Lost in her own memories. Ellie squeezes her tight then flops on the grass to watch the evening sky. First stars come out. She muses....

VOICE (O.C.)
Ellie....?

A SHADOW LEANS OVER HER. Her father? Joss dangles her Medal of Freedom and drops it in her palms. She reaches up taking his hand.

ELLIE
Palmer, I missed you.

He kisses her Mother on the forehead.

MOTHER
Eleanor made straight A's--

JOSS
She sure did, Mrs. Arroway--

Joss sits beside Ellie. She finds herself curling into his lap quite naturally. He doesn't resist.

ELLIE
You know, whether the world believes me is not very important any more. It really happened to us and they can never take that away from me...If everyone could just see Earth the way Hadden saw it. No boundaries to fight over. No nations. No ethnic pride tearing people apart. Which God to worship. Which tree to cut down--We could go to the stars if we wanted to. It's our right to take our place in the Galactic community. Our human right. But nobody believes us--

JOSS
People are going to believe you, Ellie. Millions. All over the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSS (CONT'D)
I think of the scope of your universe--it takes my breath away. You were right. My God was too small.

She looks at him askance. This man has come a long way.

JOSS (continuing)
People need proof. Physical evidence.

ELLIE
No faith?....You sound like me and I sound like you. We switched.

She enjoys watching him blush, falling on his own sword.

JOSS
The message your--uh--your---

ELLIE
Try "father in heaven".

JOSS (continuing)
The message your father told you about--hidden in Pi. You have to find it. You have to try.

Ellie sits up facing him. He's serious. Passionate.

JOSS (continuing)
Whatever you need, the money is there. A gift from Sol. Buy a computer the size of a house---

ELLIE
Have you ever been married?

JOSS
Nope. Too busy. Ever been in love?

ELLIE
There was always so much noise--the signal wasn't clear enough--till...now....

Joss takes her in his arms. Both kissing each other's tears away. Their joy complete. The Universe twinkles behind them. Mom's frozen smile watching it eternal.

DISSOLVE TO:

A MASSIVE COMPUTER DISPLAY FILLS THE VIEW

A futuristic room. A digital clock tells us it's New Year's Eve, 2004. The newest generation of "HADDEN" computer is the size of a house. On the mega-display, an equation glows. The symbol for Pi like a trademark above it. Numbers fly by. Random. No pattern.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A CHILD enters, age 4; a beautiful boy with the eyes of Ellie. He pulls himself on the hi-tek command seat, complete with armchair controls and a virtual reality helmet. Ellie's peanut butter lid dangles like a rabbit's foot. A picture of the child's grandfather he never knew.

Ellie enters--now Fifty and eternally beautiful.

ELLIE
There you are, Jake. Playing with Mommy's toy again, huh--See this is--

She sits with him in the chair to let him bang the keyboard when suddenly an alarm goes off--

It's similar to Argus when the message was received. Ellie tenses afraid to let go of her child. Jake starts singing instinctively--"the alphabet song". "A-B-C-D-E--"

Something begins to happen on the display. Numbers reflect dancing across Jake's wide innocent eyes. Ellie's are just as wide. Both mesmerised.

Joss hurries in having heard the signal--he stops at the sight--

The display freezes! There, before Ellie and child-- after a trillion random numbers--a line of uninterrupted **zeros** scans left to right.

00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000001000000000000000000000000

The second line shows a single numeral "1", exactly in the middle, with zeros to the border, left and right. After a few more lines, an umistakable arc forms, composed of ones. The simple geometrical figure is quickly contructed, line by line, The last line of the figure emerges, all zeros except for a single centered one, "1".

The "1"s form a perfect circle.

Ellie gushes primal joy. Her son claps his hands. Joss embraces his family. V.J. rushes in with a kid on his back. ~~Sunhkarta~~ Devi enters--Then Xi and Eda with his family!

Ellie touches Joss and her Son's hands to the circle of 1's on the display. All the children touch the circle.

ELLIE (V.O.)
The circle says the Universe was created on purpose. The circle is the artist's signature. Nature can't make a perfect circle--it had to be---created...

A PERFECT CIRCLE OF ONES IN A SEA OF ZEROS FILLS THE VIEW

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellie's son holds up the peanut butter jar lid covering the circle perfectly.

ELLIE (V.O.)
Whatever galaxy you happen to find yourself in, take the circumference of any circle, divide it by its diameter, calculate far enough and uncover a miracle.

A SERIES OF DISSOLVES: FROM ONE PERFECT CIRCLE TO ANOTHER

To a baseball---To a basketball--To a Pie tin--(or Pizza)

To a one Ring Circus--To an Auto Rotary in Massachusetts--

To a circle of children playing "ring around the rosie"

To a circle of Indians dancing thanks to the Sun--To an irrigated ring in the African desert--

To a Radio Telescope-To the Earth--To Venus--Mars--Jupiter--Saturn--its rings--

ELLIE (V.O. CONT'D)
It doesn't matter what you look like, or what you're made of, or where you come from....the message is everywhere. Standing over humans, gods, and demons, Caretakers and Tunnel Builders, there is one intelligence that is older than the Universe. It binds all beings, all life--together. Infinite. Eternal. The Circle has closed.

HADDEN'S POD ROCKET BLASTS INTO VIEW

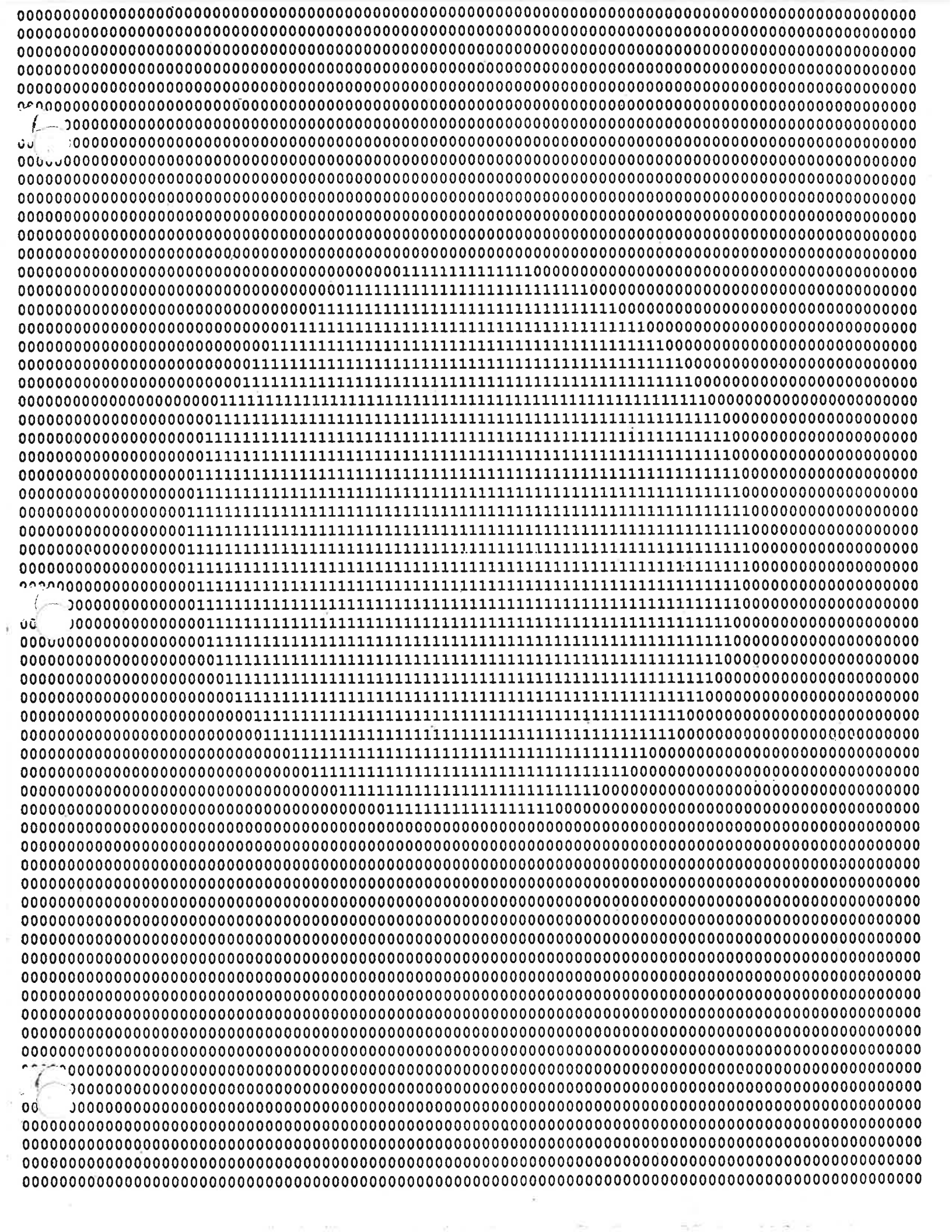
Right through the rings of Saturn! We see him. Eyes wide open in frozen sleep. Arms folded across his chest. Smile of contentment fixed forever on his face.

SUPER: THE UNBROKEN*CIRCLE OF ONES

Hadden passes right through it. Bullseye!

The Cosmos spreads beckoning beyond--Hadden fades until he is but a speck of light--at one with the stars!

BRING ON THE MILLENIUM!



FOR DAVID WHO HAS GONE TO THE STARS
AHEAD OF US TO CHECK THINGS OUT--

AND FOR ALL THE INCREDIBLE WOMEN WHO
HAVE INSPIRED THIS WRITER TO REACH
FOR THE STARS ON THIS ONE ---

JIM HART
NEW YORK CITY
1:11 AM 5/1/93